# SERMONS

ON SEVERAL

# Important Subjects.

By the Late Reverend

Mr FREDERICK CARMICHAEL,

One of the Miniſters of *Edinburgh*.

The SECOND EDITION.

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# PREFACE.

*THE following ſermons are the genuine remains of one whoſe diſtinguiſhed worth and ability juſtly intitled him to a high degree of the public regard. He was ordained a miniſter of the church of* Scotland *in* 1737; *and for four years remained in the charge of* Monimail; *whence he was tranſlated to* Invereſk. *When he firſt entered on that large and populous charge, he had no little oppoſition and prejudice to encounter. But his merit was no ſooner known, than it ſurmounted every prejudice; and in a ſhort time, his warmeſt oppoſers became his moſt zealous friends. From his firſt appearance in a public ſtation, his character continuing uniformly to riſe in the juſt eſteem of the world, he had not been long ſettled in* Invereſk, *till he received an invitation to the chair of divinity profeſſor in the*

*Mariſchal college of* Aberdeen; *which he declined to accept; and in* 1747, *was called to be one of the miniſters of* Edinburgh. *In all the congregations of which he had the charge, no man could be more regarded and beloved than he was by perſons of all ranks. His behaviour was in every reſpect ſuited to the dignity of the ſacred character; ſullied by no meanneſs, and no vice. He was of a generous open ſpirit; a warm friend; endowed with a clear underſtanding, a ſound head, and an upright heart. A noble indignation at whatever was baſe or diſhonourable, and a firm and bold adherence to juſtice and honeſty, diſtinguiſhed his character. As theſe manly qualities, joined with thorough good ſenſe, commanded the higheſt eſteem; ſo his open candour, and ſocial humane diſpoſition attach'd many perſonal friends to him, and gained the affection of all who knew him. In his preaching he was remarkably animated, and perſwaſive. That ſpirit and fire which diſtinguiſhed his manner, commanded the profound attention of every audience: he ſpoke with*

*all*

*all the energy of one who deeply felt what he inculcated on others. He applied himſelf to ſtudy the conſtitution of the church of which he was a member; and in its judicatories his ſentiments were highly regarded. He had that weight with all the different contending parties which the greateſt abilities can only acquire, when they are ſupported by entire and approved integrity. Thus qualified for being extenſively uſeful, and acting an eminent and conſpicuous part in that ſphere which belonged to him, a ſhort illneſs put a period to his life in the forty third year of his age. So untimely a death, in the midſt of thoſe hopes which were juſtly formed of him, was matter not only of private affliction to his friends, but of public ſorrow.*

*HIS ſermons which are now printed appear under conſiderable diſadvantages. They were not intended for the preſs. Tho' often ſollicited, he could not be prevailed on to conſent to the publication of any of them. His papers were found in diſorder; and they want*

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*all the advantage of the Author's finiſhing hand: yet ſtill, the reader will find in them ſuch an excellent ſtrain of rational devotion, ſound thought and clear reaſoning, as gives ground to expect, that they will contribute to ſerve the intereſt of true piety and religion: and 'tis hoped, it will be no diſadvantage to their reception with the world, that they are publiſhed for the benefit of the family of Mr.* FREDERICK CARMICHAEL.

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# SERMON I.

## Of the OBSTACLES to Progreſs in RELIGION.

HEB. xii. 1.

*Let us lay aſide every weight* ——

WHEN we reflect on the great variety of motives and incitements, that are ſet before us, to perſuade us to conſtancy and zeal in the ſervice of God, it muſt be matter of ſurprize to obſerve how little influence they have upon ourſelves or others. Every principle of action is wrought upon, every paſſion in our breaſts is applied to; every thing, in ſhort, that has power to move the heart of man, is adduced to perſuade us to a chearful obedience: and yet how little

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progreſs do we make in holineſs and goodneſs! how lukewarm, or rather how cold are we in our religious endeavours! how inconſtant and variable in our obedience! and how far ſhort do we come, in our practice, of the rules and precepts of that holy religion which we profeſs! A conduct ſo inconſiſtent with reaſon as this muſt certainly proceed from our entertaining ſome falſe principles and miſtaken notions of things, the unhappy influence of which tends to defeat all the motives of the goſpel; or from our indulging ourſelves in a careleſs indolence, and not duly ſtriving againſt that wrong biaſs and corruption of nature, which of itſelf indeed is a mighty hindrance to our *growing in grace*, and *perfecting holineſs in the fear of God*. It muſt therefore be a matter of great concern and moment to all of us, to know what are thoſe falſe principles, thoſe miſchievous impediments, which ſo much obſtruct our growth and progreſs in religion; that being warned and

and armed againſt them, we may hence- SERM. I.
forth be *conſtant and immovable, and abounding in the work of the Lord.* To give you a brief repreſentation of them, is, what, by the aſſiſtance of God, I propoſe from the words now read, *Let us lay aſide every weight.*

THE Apoſtle is here ſpeaking of the Chriſtian life, under the notion of a race; alluding to the public ſports of that kind, which were performed with ſo much ſolemnity and pomp by the antient *Greeks* and *Romans*, in honour of their gods. The ſaints already glorified, a noble catalogue of whom he gives us in the preceeding chapter, the apoſtle conſiders as the witneſſes of this race, who, by their example, inſtruct us how we are to behave in it; and by their ſucceſs afford us the encouraging hope, that if we follow their ſteps, we ſhall aſſuredly obtain the ſame crown. From this he exhorts us to *lay aſide every weight, and the*

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*ſin that doth more eaſily beſet us, and to run with patience the race that is ſet before us:* where, by *every weight*, we are evidently to underſtand every thing that will ſtop or retard us in running the race; every thing, in ſhort, that may be a hinderance to us in making that progreſs in the religious life, and advancing towards that perfection of holineſs which the laws of Chriſt require.

WHAT I have in view then from theſe words is, both to point out the principal impediments of our ſtedfaſtneſs and growth in religion, and to hint, as I go along, the proper means of our ſtriving againſt them with advantage and ſucceſs. The ſubject is large and extenſive, and I am abundantly ſenſible, how much I muſt need the pardon of the judicious hearer, for the defectiveneſs of what I can offer upon it, within the bounds of this diſcourſe.

THE

THE *firſt* particular I ſhall mention, as being a very conſiderable hinderance and impediment to us in the ſervice of God, is our entertaining looſe notions of religion.

THERE are many who imagine that zeal in the ſervice of God is an exceſs of righteouſneſs; and that moderation, which is in other caſes ſo highly commendable, cannot in this deſerve blame. They are reſolved to have their religion ſit eaſy upon them, and can ſee no neceſſity of their ſtill *growing in grace*, and ſtriving after perfection in holineſs. They hope to ſave their ſouls from hell, and are contented to forfeit any higher degrees of bliſs, that may be the reward of a more troubleſome and laborious religion. Hence, among many profeſſing Chriſtians, fervency and warmth in devotion, humility, poverty of ſpirit, ſelf-denial, and mortification are ſo far from being viſible in their practice, that they ſeem almoſt to have loſt the AERY notion of them.

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BUT let the men who are capable of ſuch thoughts take care leſt they be widely miſtaken in their notions of religion. The nature of things is not to be altered by their fancies, and God will not be mocked. If we would deal ſincerely with ourſelves, (as in this caſe particularly it highly concerns us to do) we muſt form our thoughts of religion, not from our own corrupt inclinations, not from the opinions, manners, and faſhions of a degenerate world, but from the ſcriptures of truth, and the declarations of God himſelf. For this purpoſe, let us conſider the great end of religion, as therein held forth to us; which is to promote the glory of God, and the good of mankind, to raiſe us above the world and the fleſh, to make us delight in pleaſures ſpiritual and refined; and from thence we may judge how far our conceptions of religion ſuit with theſe purpoſes, and come up to theſe great ends. Let us conſult the word of God, and there we will find ſuch repeated exhortations

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to diligence and earneſtneſs, to a conſtant watchfulneſs, to fear and trembling, to patience and ſtedfaſtneſs, as are directly oppoſite to that eaſy and lazy religion, beyond which too too many never aſpire. Let us conſider the lives of the diſciples and apoſtles of Chriſt, and the firſt profeſſors of our holy faith, whoſe example we are commanded to ſtudy and imitate; and there we will ſee what virtues and graces, what labours and ſtrivings are neceſſary to obtain that *incorruptible crown* which they are poſſeſſed of. With what earneſtneſs did theſe true ſervants of the bleſſed Jeſus *preſs forwards towards the mark?* With what courage, nay joy, did they *take up their croſs*, and follow him? How frequent and fervent was their devotion? how noble and generous their charity? What grace, what humility ſhone forth in all their converſation? The true ſpirit of Chriſtianity diſcovered itſelf in all they ſaid and did, and the virtues of their lives as eminently diſtinguiſh'd them from the

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reſt of the world, as their faith and belief. Then did Chriſtians truly overcome the world, and live above the body. Then did they indeed *by the ſpirit wait for the hope of righteouſneſs by faith*, and the croſs of Chriſt was more delightful to them, than all the eaſe and honour, the pride and pleaſure of a ſinful life. And can we, my friends, compare our lives with theirs, and ſit down contented with ſuch poor and low attainments? Can we put them in the balance againſt ourſelves, and will not the inequality put us out of countenance? Do we indeed profeſs the ſame religion with them? are we under the ſame obligations? do we expect and look for the ſame reward? and yet are our lives ſo widely different from theirs? Well may we bluſh at our being left ſo far behind, and ſcarcely have the confidence to call our ſelves by the ſame name, or to look for the ſame inheritance with them.

WE, alas! have endeavoured to enlarge the

the way to heaven, and widen *the gate that leadeth unto life*. We pleaſe ourſelves with more eaſy ſchemes of religion, with ſuch as are accommodated to our own humours and fancies, and to the modes and faſhions of a backſliding age, rather than to the precepts and example of Chriſt and his apoſtles. But whatever vain notions we may form, our religion is ſtill the ſame, as in thoſe early ages of Chriſtianity; and the conditions of the divine love and favour have undergone no change ſince then. Then were Chriſtians called to a continual warfare, to a conſtant vigilance and wreſtling with numerous ſurrounding foes; and the crown of victory was promiſed to him alone, who *endured to the end*, and *fought the good fight of faith*. Our ſituation is not more ſecure than theirs; our ſtruggle muſt be as great; nor muſt we expect to attain to the reward on eaſier terms than they. But then,

*Secondly*,

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*Secondly*, As there are ſome who are thus deceived with looſe notions of religion, and who flatter themſelves that there is no neceſſity for ſo much diligence and zeal in the ſervice of God; ſo there are others, who look upon this perfection of holineſs required in the goſpel, as what is abſolutely impoſſible for human nature. This is another great weight and hinderance, and a deſpair of ever ſucceeding in our duty diſcourages us from labouring after it.

MANY forming their judgment of things upon the weakneſs and corruption of human nature, and the defects and infirmities which, no doubt, are to be found in the beſt of men, conceive of that perfection required of Chriſtians as a chimerical imaginary thing, which it never was in the power of man to come up to. They will acknowledge indeed, that, conſidering how very ready men are to come ſhort of their duty, it is but fit and reaſonable

ſonable, that the rule preſcribed to them ſhould be exact and ſtrict, and that they ſhould be ſtrongly preſſed to a full conformity to it; but at the ſame time, they are perſuaded, that this is an attainment vaſtly too high for mortal man to aim at. Many there are, who engage in the Chriſtian life with great zeal and vigour; they are mighty ſanguine in their reſolutions, and without having counted the coſt, and reckoned upon the difficulties before them, they promiſe themſelves that all will be fair and eaſy: but no ſooner they encounter temptations and trials, and begin to feel their own weakneſs, and the power of the enemy, than, behold! they ſtand ſurprized and amazed; their ſpirits droop, their courage fails them; after a ſhort ſtruggle they give up the cauſe as loſt: and now they perſuade themſelves, that the way is unpaſſable, which before they believed to be ſo ſmooth and plain, and either make a haſty retreat, or, at leaſt, never attempt to make any further progreſs.

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BUT let us examine the matter to the bottom, and perhaps we ſhall find, that it is an inward averſion to the life and exerciſe of virtue, rather than any real belief of unſurmountable difficulties in religion, that has given riſe to ſuch apprehenſions as theſe. Let us diligently ſearch, if this be not an artful excuſe, a plauſible pretence for our coldneſs or lukewarmneſs in the practice of Chriſtianity, that the holineſs it requires is altogether impracticable. But if we have really impoſed on ourſelves by ſuch a falſe notion as this, let us reflect,

1*ſt*, THAT the chief difficulties in religion commonly occur at our firſt entrance upon it; and yet theſe muſt be conquered, if we would not periſh for ever. The nearer we approach to that perfection in holineſs which is required of us, religion becomes ſtill the more eaſy, delightful and pleaſant. If with bravery and reſolution we go on, we ſhall find the

the *yoke of Chriſt* ſtill more *eaſy*, and *his burden* more *light*; and we ſhall ſoon attain to the joyful experience, that *the ways of wiſdom are pleaſantneſs*, and *that all her paths are peace*. If we *go forth weeping, bearing the precious ſeed, we ſhall return rejoicing, bearing our ſheaves with us*. Thus you know it is in common life; a condition, which at firſt appears extremely burdenſome, will in ſome time become more tolerable, and at length perhaps ſo agreeable, that it is not without regret we can think of a change. But how much more muſt this be the caſe in religion, which is the only ſource of real and laſting pleaſure, and carries our happineſs here to as great a height, as the imperfect ſtate we are now placed in can well admit. It is not with religion, as it is with the pleaſures of ſin: the more we taſte of theſe, the more we muſt needs deſpiſe them. But religion, the more acquaintance we have with it, the more we find in it of real and ſubſtantial worth; it more than

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anſwers all our expectations, and outdoes our higheſt hopes. Let us not then ſit down diſpirited on account of any difficulties we may meet with in the beginning of our journey; but let us *forget the things that are behind, and reach forth to the things that are before.* Let us *quit ourſelves like men, and be ſtrong*; for conſider in the

2*d* place, that it is *God that worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleaſure* *. We may look on the religion of Chriſt as a religion fitter for angels than men, and on the exalted holineſs which it requires as altogether above our power in our preſent weak and corrupted ſtate: but our ability to give obedience to the precepts of the goſpel, is not to be meaſured by our own ſtrength, but by the power of the Spirit of God, and the all-ſufficiency of the divine grace, which is promiſed, ſecured, and offered to us. Our warfare indeed is dangerous, our duty is diffi-

* Philip. ii. 13.

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cult, and our wiſdom and courage are but ſmall; but we are not called to go out into this warfare at our own charges, depending on our own fortitude and conduct alone; we have ſuperior aid and aſſiſtance provided for us, through which we ſhall be *more than conquerors*. Let us not then harbour in our breaſts, thoſe timorous and diſpiriting apprehenſions, which ſpring from an evil root. But when the dangers and difficulties of the Chriſtian life are ready to diſmay us, let us reflect, that *through Chriſt ſtrengthening us we ſhall be able to do all things* *. And let us often call to mind, when we are tempted to turn our back on religion, that heaven is a cheap purchaſe, how dear ſoever it may coſt us: that we are not our own maſters; that there is a God above us, who has aſſigned us our poſt and ſtation, and to whom we are accountable for our behaviour in it; that, in ſhort, whether we will or will not, we muſt either ſub-

* Philip. iv. 13.

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mit to the ſelf-denial and mortification of religion, or expoſe ourſelves to the endleſs plagues and puniſhments of ſin. Let us then no longer object and diſpute, but with *faith and patience be followers of thoſe who inherit the promiſes.* They went through honour and diſhonour, proſperity and adverſity, good report and bad report, till they arrived at the bleſſed reſt reſerved for the people of God. The ſame glorious prize is ſtill propoſed to us, the ſame aſſiſtances are offered to us, our difficulties are no greater than theirs. Let us not then, through a daſtardly fear or through miſtaken notions of things, forfeit our ſhare in that bliſs, which they are now poſſeſſed of.

3*dly*, ANOTHER great hinderance and impediment to our making progreſs in religion, and *running our race with patience*, is a mixture of infidelity; the weakneſs or the want of faith in the declarations and promiſes of God.

THIS

THIS was evidently the caſe of the *Iſraelites* in the wilderneſs; their doubting of the promiſes of God was the ſource of all their backſlidings; and hence flowed their frequent revolts to idolatry, which kindled the divine wrath againſt them. It is to be feared, that this is the caſe of too many Chriſtians, and that their unfruitfulneſs and lukewarmneſs in religion may frequently be traced back to the ſame origin and ſpring, namely, a tincture of unbelief. Are not the proſperity of the wicked, and the afflictions of the righteous, apt ſometimes to weaken our belief of Providence? Are we not thereby tempted to ſay, as it is in *Job*, *What advantage ſhall it be to us, and what profit ſhall we have, if we are cleanſed from our Sins?** May we not often find a ſecret doubt lurking in our breaſts, whether religion be the true bleſſedneſs of life; and whether there be that delight and pleaſure in the practice of righteouſneſs, which the ſcripture af-

* Job xxxv. 3.

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firms that there is? Whatever we profeſs to believe of an inheritance above, of a treaſure in heaven, does not the conduct of too many plainly ſhow, that they look on it as the wiſer courſe to ſecure at any rate their portion and their treaſure here? Direct and open infidelity has not, I hope, as yet ſpread its contagion widely; but have not the objections of adverſaries againſt our holy faith, and the moſt important articles thereof, been often received by men with a ſecret ſatisfaction, which, even to themſelves, they durſt not avow? Have they not ſometimes been employ'd to bear down the riſings of conſcience, and to ſooth men in a careleſs, or even in a diſſolute life? Have not ſuch thoughts as theſe, that the way to happineſs may be more broad and ſmooth than it is repreſented in the Goſpel; that God will receive us into heaven upon ſofter and milder terms; that he will not execute judgment with that rigour which he has threaten'd; that tho' he is a ſevere law-

lawgiver, yet he will not be ſuch a terrible judge; have not, I ſay, ſuch thoughts as theſe ſometimes found a welcome reception in the minds, even of profeſſing Chriſtians? and have they not had an unhappy influence on their life and conduct? When the *word preached doth not profit*, ſo as to make us *zealous*, and *to abound in good works*, it is becauſe it is not mingled with a due meaſure of *faith*, *in thoſe that hear it*. * Did we, my brethren, truly believe the revelation of God; were his promiſes and threatnings evident and preſent to us by faith, tho' diſtant in themſelves; it is impoſſible but they muſt affect and move us in a different manner, render us more earneſtly watchful to avoid thoſe paths that lead to deſtruction, kindle in us more vehement deſires, and produce in us ſtronger endeavours after that holineſs, without which *no man ſhall ſee the Lord*, or taſte of the celeſtial bliſs. We ſee how the proſpect of gain captivates the covetous,

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* Heb. iv. 2

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the expectation of pleaſure inflames the voluptuous, the ſight of vanity and grandeur elates the proud, and the hope of glory fires the ambitious; and ſhould not the charms of holineſs and goodneſs have the ſame, nay rather a greater power over the true Chriſtian? ſhould not the proſpect of the heavenly crown animate and inſpire his ſoul? ſhould not the hope of the eternal fruition of God have ſuch a commanding influence on him, as to make him regulate the whole of his life and converſation with a view to this glorous end? The promiſes of God are ſurely *great* and *precious*, and if they work not mightily on our minds, it is not thro' the want of excellence in them, but want of faith in us. Let us then, with the Patriarchs of old, tho' we have not yet *received the promiſes*, yet *ſeeing them afar off, be perſuaded of, and embrace them.* Let us *have reſpect unto the recompence of reward*, being fully perſuaded that *what God hath promiſed, he is alſo able to perform. Let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith with-*

*out*

*out wavering*; and as many *deceivers have enter'd into the world*, and *ſcoffers* in theſe our *laſt days*, who *walk after their own luſts, and ſay, where is the promiſe of his coming?* take heed to yourſelves, that ye be not enſnared by following them; take heed leſt ye alſo *be led away by the error of the wicked ſo as to fall from your own ſtedfaſtneſs*. They ſpeak to *thruſt you out of the way, which the Lord your God hath commanded you to walk in; take heed leſt there be in you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.* Let it be our conſtant prayer, that God would *help our unbelief*, and *increaſe our faith*, and that our faith may be in us a living principle of every virtue and grace, and may powerfully incite us to *adorn the doctrine of God and our Saviour in all things*. But to proceed;

4*thly*, ANOTHER great hinderance to our ſucceſsfully *running our race* and making due progreſs in religion, is, our ſtill retaining in our breaſts too great a love for

earthly

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earthly enjoyments and poſſeſſions, and our being too much under the influence of ſome wordly deſire or paſſion. *Love not the world*, ſaith the apoſtle, *neither the things that are in the world, for if any man love the world, the love of the father is not in him.** This is the deſtructive paſſion, which, tho' in various degrees, yet univerſally prevails with the children of men. In ſome it reigns with a power ſo uncontrouled, that it renders them entirely blind to their true and moſt valuable intereſt, and makes them go on thoughtleſs and ſecure in a bold contempt of God and of all the threatnings of his word. In how many others has it the unhappy influence to ſtifle the cries of conſcience, nay, to deſtroy the moſt promiſing beginnings of holineſs and goodneſs? Such are they whom our Lord ſpeaks of in the parable of the ſower, *ſome fell among thorns*, ſays he, *and the thorns grew up and choked it. They that are ſown among thorns*, ſays he, in the explica-

* 1 John ii. 15.

tion

tion of the parable, *are ſuch as hear the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulneſs of riches choke the word and it becometh unfruitful.* * This appears to have been the caſe of *Herod*. We are told that he received *John* the baptiſt as a *holy and a juſt man, and obſerved him, and heard him gladly, and did many things upon it.* † But he was drawn back by the charms of his *Herodias*, and thus all the impreſſions of the holy Prophet's teaching were ſoon defaced. This alſo was the caſe of the young man in the goſpel, who came to Chriſt with the queſtion, *What ſhall I do to inherit eternal life?* ‡ When firſt he addreſſes himſelf to our bleſſed Lord, who would not have thought but he was in the right way to heaven? His life, as to the great commandments of the law, had been innocent and blameleſs; he comes with a ſeemingly earneſt deſire of being further inſtructed in the way to happineſs; he attracts the love of the Saviour of mankind:

* Math. xiii. 24. † Mark vi. 20. ‡ Luke xviii. 18.

but

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but yet we ſee, that a ſecret love to the things of the world blaſted all thoſe fair appearances. Now the caſe is juſt the ſame with every one, who is but *almoſt a Chriſtian*. He is under the power and dominion of ſome ſenſual worldly luſt. This is that which to him ſpoils the reliſh of the hidden manna, and obſcures the beauty of the heavenly *Canaan* in his eyes. Whence is it that we ſee men ſo generally careleſs and indifferent in the purſuit of their ſpiritual concerns, but from their being too fond of the body and its pleaſures? Whence is it that they ſeek not the heavenly bliſs with that application and earneſtneſs which its worth and excellence deſerves, but from their being too much engaged with this world and its enjoyments, and ſo too willing and ready to take up their reſt on this ſide of *Jordan*? But, my friends, they only who triumph over the world are crowned; and they who *ſow to* the world and *the fleſh*, *ſhall* of the world and *of the fleſh reap corruption*.

BESIDES

BESIDES this vitious and exceſſive love of the world, there is another kind, which it may perhaps be allowed is neither in the matter nor degree of it ſo criminal, as to be quite incompatible with ſincerity in religion, nor ſubverſive of our hope of heaven; yet it may be ſufficiently ſtrong to abate our vigour, and to hinder our progreſs and growth in religion: And it is this meaſure of wordly care and affection, which, in the opinion of many learned divines, the apoſtle has particularly in view in the paſſage we are now diſcourſing from. He conſiders, ſay they, the Chriſtian who ſets out on the religious courſe, while he ſtill retains his love to the world, as one who would engage in a race with a looſe heavy garment, which muſt needs ſo moleſt and entangle him, as to leſſen his ſpeed; which may probably occaſion his ſtumbling and falling; and which is at the beſt but an uſeleſs weight, and therefore ought to be thrown aſide. A Chriſtian may have too much concern for the

pomp

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pomp and ſhew of life; too great a deſire to grow rich, to *join houſe to houſe, and land to land*, and to *load himſelf with thick clay*. He may have too brisk, too exquiſite a reliſh even of the lawful pleaſures of the world. He may have too great an exaltation of mind upon his ſucceſſes in it, and too great dejection of ſpirit upon his loſſes and diſappointments. He may, in ſhort, encumber and embroil himſelf too much with the things of the world; tho' not ſo far as to occaſion the ſickneſs and death, yet enough to abate the ſpiritual vigour and health of his ſoul, and to retard his progreſs in the ways of holineſs. Now, the more we find ourſelves in danger of this, let us endeavour the more to have *our converſation in heaven*. Let us meditate frequently and ſeriouſly on the infinite rewards promiſed to the ſervant who is faithful and diligent; on the pleaſure that attends the practice of goodneſs here, and the eternal happineſs that awaits it hereafter. Had the young man, whom

whom we juſt now mentioned, made a juſt eſtimate of the riches of eternity, would he have *gone away ſorrowful*, when he was adviſed to exchange the treaſures of earth for thoſe of heaven? Did we often reflect how ſoon the faſhion, the pomp, and grandeur of this world paſſeth away; how much better our heavenly country is, than this houſe of our earthly pilgrimage, we could neither rejoice nor weep for the things of the world with too great emotion of ſpirit. Did we ſo often and ſo devoutly think of that time, when *Chriſt who is our life ſhall appear, and when we alſo ſhall appear with him in glory*, as to make us love and long for that joyful day, we could not well be in danger of overrating, and conſequently acquiring too high a taſte for the riches, honours, or pleaſures of the world. We would have no application of mind, but to abound in good works; no ambition, but for that happineſs which is eternal. In the purſuit of theſe ends we would lay out the

ſtrength

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ſtrength and vigour of our minds; for theſe we would chearfully give up our preſent pleaſures, and retrench our preſent profits, and be content to be mean, laborious and obſcure in the world: for if the *world* be once *crucified in us*, we ſhall the more eaſily bear being *crucified to it*.

5*thly*, ANOTHER weight which encumbers and retards us in running our chriſtian race, is ſlothfulneſs; a vitious indolence and want of reſolution. Theſe were the great ſources of that inſtability and fickleneſs of mind that appeared in the *Iſraelites*, after they were brought from *Egypt* into the wilderneſs. They no doubt deſired to be poſſeſſed of *Canaan* the land of promiſe; but they could not think of purchaſing it at the expence of ſo many hardſhips, ſuch tedious marches and dangerous encounters as they ſaw before them, ſo that every now and then they preferr'd the inglorious ſlavery of *Egypt* to their freedom in the land flowing with milk and honey on ſuch

ſuch difficult terms. And thus, I am afraid, it is with many Chriſtians. They aſpire after heaven, and gladly would they have their lot in the *Canaan* that is above, could they but purchaſe it at an eaſier rate. They profeſs to be the diſciples of Chriſt, and would ſhare in the merit of his death and ſufferings; but they will not *take up his croſs and follow him*: nor can they think of venturing upon that laborious courſe of watching and diligence, of meditation and prayer, which he has enjoined his diſciples. The wages, which Chriſt offers to his ſervants, they are extremely pleaſed with, and therefore they will liſt themſelves in his ſervice; while at the ſame time the work he requires, thro' their own ſloth and lazineſs, appears ſo intolerably ſevere, that they can by no means brook it. In ſhort, they wiſh to arrive at the end without being put to the trouble of uſing thoſe means which God has preſcribed in order to it. And this ſlothfulneſs of theirs is conſtantly joined with cowardice

and

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and a daſtardly meanneſs of ſpirit, that moves them to decline every difficulty, and diſables them from making a bold reſiſtance to temptations. They ſhun as much as they can every encounter with their ſpiritual enemies; they will rather ſubmit to their power, than hazard an engagement; and yet while they are thus behaving, they fondly hope they ſhall at length obtain the reward of victory. But, alas! as ſoon might *Iſrael* have gained her liberty without leaving the houſe of bondage, or have arrived at the pleaſant land, without travel, hardſhip, and blood, as the Chriſtian may obtain the inheritance of the ſaints in light, without the continual exerciſe of patience and fortitude. As ſoon may we expect to ſubdue our enemies without arms or diſcipline, as to maſter our corruptions, to conquer temptations, without diligence, meditation and prayer. Can our natural life ſubſiſt without the ſupplies of food, which repair the daily decays thereof? no more can our ſpiritual

life

life be maintained without a conſtant care of its ſuſtenance and welfare. The means which God hath appointed for the attainment and increaſe of holineſs, are doubtleſs very proper and well adapted to the end; and we have the higheſt encouragement to expect that they ſhall be attended with a divine power and energy; but can their happy influence be felt by ſuch as neglect and deſpiſe them? The grace of God is no doubt ſufficient to ſtrengthen and eſtabliſh us in the ways of holineſs; but then it muſt, with frequency and earneſtneſs, be asked of God, and carefully cheriſhed and improved, when it is obtained. The word of God has force and efficacy to enlighten the mind and purify the heart, but it muſt be received not as the word of man, but, as it is indeed, the word of God. We muſt *hide it in our hearts* and *meditate thereon day* and *night*. If we are ſo ſunk in lazineſs and ſloth, that we either will not uſe the means appointed by God, or only apply ourſelves to them

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them with a lifeleſs formality, whilſt we habitually indulge ourſelves in a vain and trifling converſation, what wonder is it, if our life is unſteady and unfruitful; if our faith is weak, and our affections groveling; if, in ſhort, our religion is deſtitute of true pleaſure, and our latter end of comfort and confidence in God? It is naturally to be expected, that the ſoul of the ſluggard will be like his vineyard, as deſcribed by the wiſe man in the book of *Proverbs* xxiv. 30. *I went by the field of the ſlothful and the vineyard of the man void of underſtanding, and lo! it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the ſtone wall thereof was broken down.* How criminal, how guilty muſt this ſlothfulneſs in the ſervice of God render us in his ſight! Is this like the revenge which the ſincere penitent has vowed to take upon his luſts? Is this like the hatred which he has ſworn againſt that evil and *abominable thing* that God hateth? Is this like the war which he has proclaimed

ed againſt all the enemies of God and goodneſs? Is this to redeem the time, and to make amends for our paſt neglect in the work of God, by our future zeal and diligence in keeping his commandments? Is this the *hungring and thirſting after righteouſneſs*, which becomes the children of God, and the diſciples of the holy Jeſus? Is this behaving like thoſe faithful ſervants who would be found *watching with their loins girded, and their lamps burning, when their Maſter cometh?* Is this improving in a right manner the talents our Lord hath intruſted us with? or can we thus expect to be received with that bleſſed welcome, *Enter ye into the joy of your Lord?* Is it not rather a *wrapping up the talent in a napkin, burying it in the earth*, and keeping it uſeleſs and unemployed? Is this, my brethren, like the conduct of true ſoldiers of Jeſus Chriſt, who ought to *take unto them the whole armour of God, that they may reſiſt the fiery darts of the devil, that they may withſtand in the evil day, and having*

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*done all may ſtand*; who by their character are bound to watch, that the enemy may not gain the ſmalleſt advantage over them, and never to turn their backs till they have gained the victory, and that crown which the Captain of their ſalvation hath promiſed to *them that overcome?* Is ſuch ſlothfulneſs in the ſervice of God a fit requital for his infinite goodneſs and mercy? Is it thus that we promote the honour of our bleſſed Redeemer, who *loved us to the death*, and who died that he *might redeem us to himſelf a peculiar people zealous of good works?* Can we entertain ſuitable thoughts of his amazing love, who ſhow ſo much coldneſs and indifference for that ſalvation, which the Son of God hath purchaſed by ſo much ſhame and ſorrow, ſo much travail and blood? Let us not then, my brethren, be *ſlothful*, but *fervent in ſpirit ſerving the Lord.* Let us *quit ourſelves like men, and be ſtrong*, be *zealous towards God, ready to every good work*, and *diligent, that we may be found of God without ſpot, and*

*blameleſs*

*blameleſs. Let us not be weary in well-doing, knowing that in due ſeaſon we ſhall reap if we faint not. Let us give all diligence to add to our faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge temperance, to temperance patience, to patience godlineſs, to godlineſs brotherly kindneſs, and to brotherly kindneſs charity; that theſe things being in us, and abounding, we may be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, but may have an entrance adminiſtred to us abundantly into his everlaſting kingdom.*

THE laſt particular I ſhall mention as an hindrance of our growth and progreſs in religion, and which indeed is a-kin to that juſt now treated of, is, our not duly watching againſt the weakneſs of our nature, the infirmity of the fleſh. *The ſpirit is willing*, ſaid our bleſſed Saviour, *but the fleſh is weak* *. The warfare between the fleſh and the ſpirit, muſt in ſome meaſure remain while we are on this ſide of

* Matth. xxvi. 41.

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the grave, and therefore we ought to be always on our guard, with our arms ready, and in a poſture of defence. The young ſoldier of Chriſt, who has but lately entered into this warfare, will find the aſſaults of this enemy ſo frequent and ſharp, ſo violent and ſhocking, that he will ſee no time for careleſs ſlumber and thoughtleſs eaſe; nay, the old and experienced ſoldier muſt not be too ſecure; tho' he has often triumphed over the enemy, and repelled his fierceſt attacks, yet he may rally again his broken forces, aſſault him unawares, and give him a ſhameful defeat. As an awful warning in this matter, we have in ſcripture ſet before us the ſcandalous backſlidings of the beſt and the greateſt of men; and theſe, like ſo many claps of thunder, ſhould awaken and terrify us, who, in reſpect of them, are but weak and infirm. Now, in order to our ſucceſsful watching againſt the weakneſs and infirmity of nature, let us in the

1*ſt* PLACE carefully obſerve, where it is that our greateſt weakneſs lyes; on which ſide the enemy has attacked us with the greateſt ſucceſs; and let us be ſure to watch there with a particular circumſpection and diligence. We have all our conſtitutional failings; there are ſome ſins, as the apoſtle ſpeaks, that *do more eaſily beſet us* than others; and theſe are different in different men, according to the various propenſions of their natures. Some are more inclined to vanity and pride, others to anger and wrath; ſome to lazineſs and indolence, others to wantonneſs and the pleaſures of ſenſe. But whatever the predominant weakneſs is, it is our duty to watch againſt it with a peculiar care, and to uſe all the means which reaſon or religion furniſh us with, for correcting or reſtraining it.

2*dly*, LET us endeavour to be conſtantly in the exerciſe of *godly fear*, and this will prove an excellent remedy againſt the frailty and fickleneſs of our natures. And in

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in order to this, let us be frequently employed in meditating on God, and the perfections of his nature; his infinite knowledge and omnipreſence, by which he ſees the inmoſt receſſes of our ſouls, and is acquainted with all our ways: his unſpotted holineſs and purity which *cannot behold iniquity*, and makes him *angry with the ſinner every day:* his inflexible juſtice, in executing the threatened deſtruction on all that forſake him. Let us often revolve in our minds the awfulneſs, the impartiality of the judgment to come, when all the actions of our lives ſhall be publiſhed before angels and men, and a ſolemn ſentence ſhall be pronounced upon us accordingly. Let us ſeriouſly conſider the numerous temptations that daily aſſault us; the power and cunning of our enemies, who ly in wait to ſurprize us, and will be ſure to take the advantage of our weakneſs. Serious and frequent meditation upon ſuch ſubjects, will prove an excellent means of promoting in us this

good

good disposition of mind, and of teaching us not to be *high-minded, but to fear*; and *blessed is he that feareth always.*

3*dly*, THE great remedy against the bad consequences of the weakness and corruption of our natures is, our living in a constant dependance on God for the assistance of his grace, and the strength of his Holy Spirit, which he has promised, to supply our wants and *help our infirmities*, to *strengthen us with all might in the inner man*, and *to work in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.* Every temptation will be too strong for us, if left to ourselves, and we will be ready to yield on the first assault of the enemy; but if we fight under the banner of the great *Captain of our salvation*, we shall be sure of victory, and *shall be more than conquerors through him that loved us.*

THUS I have laid before you some of the

SERM. I. the chief hindrances to our running the Chriſtian race, and making progreſs in religion; and as I have endeavoured, under the ſeveral heads, to make ſuch practical reflections, or hint at ſuch directions as I thought proper and natural, there is now the leſs need of any formal application of the ſubject. Only allow me, in a few words, to exhort you to the duty required in the text, the *laying aſide every weight, and running with patience the race which is ſet before us.* This I might do, by repreſenting the manifold obligations we are under to it, and the bleſſed fruits and advantages that will attend it. If we have any regard to the great end of our beings, which is, by holineſs and goodneſs to promote the glory of him that made us; if we have any dutifulneſs or gratitude to that God on whom we depend for all that we are, or have, or hope for; if we have any love to our bleſſed Redeemer who died for us while *we were ſinners and enemies,* that he *might bring us to God*;

if

if we have any regard to the ſanctity of the Chriſtian character, and the repeated voluntary engagements we have brought ourſelves under to ſupport that character; if we would ſecure to ourſelves true comfort and happineſs whilſt we live in the world; if we would *die the death of the righteous*, and have *our latter end like his*; if we would provide againſt the unknown terrors of a dying hour, and render it the paſſage to endleſs bliſs — All theſe conſiderations loudly call upon us to be *conſtant and immovable*, and *to abound in the work of the Lord*; to purſue that *path of the juſt*, which, *like the ſhining light, ſhineth more and more to the perfect day*. Of all the motives to conſtancy and growth in religion, that of the crown of glory, provided for good men in the kingdom of Chriſt above, is the moſt powerful and prevalent, and therefore ought to be continually in our minds. How chearfully muſt he run the race that is ſet before him, who has the noble prize of immortality

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tality conſtantly in his eye? Who will refuſe to *endure hardſhip as a good ſoldier of Jeſus Chriſt*, who believes that He is now the ſpectator, and will ſoon be the judge and the rewarder of all his ſufferings? And if the proſpect of heaven will make the Chriſtian rejoice, even in ſuffering, how much more in doing good? If it enables him to conquer in the day of trial and affliction, how much more to abound in good works in the days of proſperity and peace? How chearfully will a man give of his ſubſtance to the poor and indigent, who by faith ſees Chriſt himſelf ſtanding by, placing it to his own accompt, to be repaid a thouſandfold in the day of the Lord? How much will it contribute to allay all the diſorders of ruffled paſſion, when faith preſents, and as it were opens to his view thoſe manſions above, which the meek ſhall inherit for ever, where there is nothing but uninterrupted peace and everlaſting love? How earneſtly, in fine, muſt he endeavour to be made perfect

fect in holineſs, who has continually in view that happineſs, which conſiſts in the perfection of purity, and can only be attained to, by ſtudying to be *holy as God is holy*, and *perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect?* SERM. I.

LET us then, my brethren, be daily contemplating that bleſſed ſtate; let us by faith render it preſent to us, and bring it home to our hearts; and thence we ſhall derive ſtrength and virtue to reſiſt temptations, and to overcome the world and the fleſh; to *lay aſide every weight, and the ſin that doth moſt eaſily beſet us; and to run with patience the race that is ſet before us; looking unto Jeſus the Author and the Finiſher of our faith, who for the joy that was ſet before him, endured the croſs, deſpiſing the ſhame, and is ſet down on the right-hand of the throne of God: unto whom,* &c.

SER-

# SERMON II.

## Of ANXIETY and SOLLICITUDE.

PHILIP. iv. 6.

*Be careful for nothing* ——

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MAN, ſaith *Job*, *is born unto trouble as the ſparks fly upwards.* Such is our ſituation in the preſent life, that we are expoſed to many calamities which no prudence can foreſee, and no induſtry nor power can guard us againſt. The frailty of our bodies, the injuries of the world, and the changeableneſs and viciſſitude of all earthly things, are fruitful ſources of a variety of ſorrows. But whilſt many of the troubles of human life are unavoidable, there are alſo many which we create to ourſelves, by ſuperfluous anxiety and ſollicitude of mind. We vex ourſelves in vain, and are ingenious in increaſing our own miſery. Our minds are quick at perceiving,

ceiving misfortunes at a diſtance, and are always ready to bode the worſt. We form the moſt frightful images of the future evil; and, not content to wait till it overtake us, we anticipate the grief, and greedily torment ourſelves before the time. By the ſame unhappy art, we magnify every preſent trouble; our buſy imagination repreſenting it in the moſt diſmal light, and painting out our caſe as wretched and forlorn. Thus our ſouls are overwhelmed within us; a peeviſh fretfulneſs gnaws us, or a ſullen gloom hangs upon the mind, which makes our lives a burthen to us, and ſometimes drives us into black deſpair. To guard us againſt theſe miſchiefs, and to enable us with conſtancy and fortitude to bear the adverſities of our preſent ſtate, is the deſign of the apoſtle's exhortation in the text, *Be careful for nothing*. In ſpeaking from which, I ſhall, in the

1*ſt* PLACE, ſtate the neceſſary limitations of

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of this general precept, and ſhow what degrees of carefulneſs religion and right reaſon allow; by which, at the ſame time, it will appear, what the carefulneſs is which is here forbid.

2*dly*, I SHALL endeavour to evince the reaſonableneſs of the precept, by ſhowing the folly and ſinfulneſs of that care and anxiety which we are here cautioned againſt.

THIS carefulneſs then may be conſidered in theſe two different views; as having for its object either ſome future miſchief, which we apprehend ourſelves in danger of, or ſome preſent evil and affliction which we ſuffer; in each of theſe it admits of very juſt limitations.

IF we conſider it in the firſt of theſe views, as reſpecting any future misfortune which we dread, it muſt not be underſtood ſo as to exclude that caution, prudence

dence and diligence which every wiſe man ought to exerciſe, in order to prevent and avoid it. Have we reaſon to fear an injurious attack on our perſon, reputation or eſtate; it becomes every man of ſenſe, and is highly conſiſtent with religion and virtue, to uſe the utmoſt caution to fruſtrate the vile deſign. Are we in hazard of falling into any dangerous diſeaſe; who but a thoughtleſs fooliſh man will not uſe every probable mean of preventing the calamity? *A prudent man*, ſaith *Solomon*, *foreſeeth the evil, and hideth himſelf, but the ſimple paſs on and are puniſhed.* But that which here principally claims our attention, is that care which reſpects our circumſtances in the world, as to riches or poverty. This is what above all other things employs the minds of men, and diſtracts their thoughts; and in this their cares are moſt ready to exceed the bounds appointed by reaſon and religion. That a competent portion of the good things of this world is a valuable bleſſing, and what

we

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we may lawfully ſearch after, will not, I ſuppoſe, be diſputed; as it tends to make our lives here agreeable and eaſy, and enables us, in many reſpects, to promote the happineſs of our fellow-creatures. By the preſent conſtitution of things, men, at leaſt the far greater part of them, cannot attain to this, but by labour and induſtry of one kind or other. Accordingly the word of God, that perfect rule of life, earneſtly recommends to us diligence in our lawful employments, and ſeverely condemns the contrary conduct. *He that provideth not for himſelf* (ſaith the apoſtle) *and for thoſe of his own houſhold, is worſe than an infidel. Be not ſlothful in buſineſs. In all labour there is profit. The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteouſneſs.* And we ſee with what ſeverity the apoſtle rebukes ſuch as *learn to be idle, working not at all, but are tatlers and buſy bodies, wandering about from houſe to houſe, ſpeaking the things which are not convenient.* We are required then to apply with diligence and induſtry

induſtry to our ſeveral employments. As this labour and induſtry cannot be exerciſed, without our having ſome thought and care for our ſucceſs in it, ſuch carefulneſs as is neceſſary to animate our diligence, muſt of conſequence be conſidered as permitted, and cannot be the ſubject of the prohibition in the text. SERM. II.

NOR are we to imagine, that this carefulneſs is only allowable, when it has for its object what may be neceſſary to raiſe us above the miſeries of poverty and indigence, and to procure for us a bare ſubſiſtence in the world; tho' ſome may tell us, that when we exceed theſe bounds, our care muſt be vitious, in regard that it is a deviation from the ſimplicity of nature. God has now eſtabliſhed a diverſity of conditions among men, ſuch as, it is probable, would never have taken place, had we continued in our original ſtate. From this diverſity of conditions, there muſt neceſſarily flow a different manner of life;

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and, whatever ſome people may talk of deviating from the ſimplicity of nature, it is extravagant to tell us, that after ſuch an eſtabliſhment, there ſhould ſtill in this reſpect be an equality between the high and the low, the rich and the poor. A man, therefore, may lawfully employ his care and induſtry in the purſuit of ſuch a proportion of the riches of the world, as will enable him to make a decent figure in that rank and ſtation in which he finds himſelf placed by God, and to live in ſuch a manner, as other people of his rank do in the time and place of the world where his lot is caſt. And thus, what in an entire conſiſtency with reaſon and religion may be the object of the cares and deſires of one man, in another of lower degree would be unreaſonable and vitious.

LET us, in the next place, conſider this carefulneſs, as it reſpects preſent trouble and affliction; and here too we ſhall find, that it is capable of many obvious limitations.

tions. By the conſtitution of our beings, we are ſuſceptible of pleaſure and pain. There are certain outward objects which, affecting our organs of ſenſe, naturally produce in us joy and comfort; and there are others which are as neceſſarily painful and afflicting. Certain thoughts and reflections are pleaſing and delightful to the mind, while others fill us with uneaſineſs and trouble. Thus our Creator, for infinitely wiſe reaſons, has appointed it to be. Such a conſtitution is neceſſary to our happineſs in the preſent life; neceſſary to incite us to a due care for the preſervation of our beings, and to make us fly from whatever is hurtful and deſtructive to them. As ſoon then may we change the laws of our nature, as hinder our rejoicing in the perception of pleaſure, or prevent our feeling the ſmart of pain. Pleaſure and pain will never be indifferent to us; nor will the Stoic, with all his ſubtilty or eloquence, ever be able to perſuade us, that there is nothing really good

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in the one, or evil in the other. In this there is more of pride and grimace than of truth and reaſon. We are not then to imagine, that the apoſtle is here preſcribing an abſolute inſenſibility under affliction; this were to require what is impoſſible, to command us to diveſt ourſelves of the feelings of human nature, and to contradict the conſtitution of our being. Beſides, are there not many things befalling us in this life, to be grieved and afflicted for which, is by no means unbecoming the wiſeſt of men, or even the beſt of Chriſtians? Not to mention religious ſorrow, or our grieving for our offences againſt God, as what no one will be ſo extravagant as to think the apoſtle could have here in his view; there is the death of thoſe to whom we have been united by the bond of natural affection, or the ſacred ties of friendſhip. If our love to them was virtuous, and founded on worthy and noble principles, our ſorrowing for their death can have nothing vitious

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or blame-worthy in it; unleſs it be carried to that exceſſive height, to which if any of the human paſſions ariſe, they are at the ſame time deſtructive to ourſelves, and ſinful in the ſight of God. A cold indifference under a calamity, ſuch as this, was never eſteemed a perfection or virtue, but with juſtice is looked upon as too certain a ſign of a diſpoſition harſh and inhumane. Our holy religion is far from diſcouraging or forbidding this virtuous ſorrow; on the contrary, it cheriſhes thoſe tender paſſions which ſoften our natures, and diſpoſe us to the duties of compaſſion and love; and in the life of its bleſſed Author, it gives us a ſhining example of friendſhip and love, and a bright pattern, how we ought to mourn over the death of a friend. Even the holy Jeſus, in whom was neither imperfection nor ſin, *groaned in his ſpirit, and was troubled* for the death of *Lazarus*. He thought it not below him to weep over the grave of him whom he had loved.

So

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THUS much of the meaſures of careful-neſs, which reaſon and religion declare to be lawful, and which cannot therefore be the ſubject of this prohibition: but we ſuffer this carefulneſs to exceed thoſe due bounds, when inſtead of rational foreſight and prudence, in the caſe of threatening misfortune, it becomes a painful anxious ſollicitude; when inſtead of that moderate grieving under the feeling of preſent evil or miſery, which is eſſential to our natures, it ſwells into a furious turbulent paſſion, or ſettles into a pining conſuming ſorrow. In either of theſe caſes it is the carefulneſs we are here warned againſt. And that leads me to the

2*d* THING I propoſed, which was, to prove the reaſonableneſs of this precept, by ſhowing the folly and ſinfulneſs of that carefulneſs which it forbids. This I ſhall endeavour to do, by conſidering it, 1*ſt*, as it reſpects ourſelves, and is of immediate bad influence on our minds; and 2*dly*, as it

it reſpects Almighty God, the Creator and Governor of the world. If we conſider it in the firſt of theſe views, we will find it to be an uneaſy hurtful paſſion, which is deſtructive of the peace and order, the happineſs and perfection of our ſouls. If we examine it in the other view, we will ſee that it is founded on wrong notions of the Deity, and flows from diſhonourable thoughts of the wiſdom and goodneſs of the divine adminiſtration.

THE ſoul is an active principle, whoſe powers and faculties cannot be preſerved in their ſtrength and vigour, unleſs they are employed and exerted about proper objects. The paſſions and affections are the ſprings of the life and action of the ſoul; by them it is excited to exert its powers and faculties, and without them they would lye inactive and torpid. But, in order that the paſſions may produce this good effect on the mind, and prompt us to that action which is neceſſary to its per-

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perfection, it is required, that they be well regulated, and kept within due bounds: for, if they be allowed to riſe to a monſtruous unnatural height, if inſtead of gently moving, they violently hurry and drive on our minds, then they pervert our faculties, and bring forth nothing but diſorder and confuſion. And of all the paſſions, there is none which produces more miſchievous effects of this kind than immoderate carefulneſs and anxiety. Upon due conſideration we will find, that it diſtracts the mind, and unfits it for every ſtudy and purſuit that is worthy and excellent; that it incapacitates us to uſe thoſe means that may be in our power for obtaining relief from our diſtreſſes; and that if carried to any exceſſive height, it commonly vitiates our tempers, impairs our faculties, and brings the moſt dreadful deſolation on the ſoul. Briefly to ſhow how this paſſion works theſe bad effects, is what I propoſe under this head.

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1ſt THEN, it diſtracts our minds, and unfits us for every ſtudy and purſuit that is worthy and excellent. In order to the ſucceſsful purſuit of any ſtudy and buſineſs, it is neceſſary that we enjoy freedom of thought, calmneſs and ſedateneſs of mind, and that we be under no biaſs and propenſion to any thing which is foreign to it. Now, 'tis certain, that trouble and miſery, either apprehended or felt, will have conſiderable force to attract and fix the mind even when under the beſt regulation; but, when, in theſe circumſtances, we give way to exceſſive carefulneſs, our minds are ſo riveted to the object of our diſtreſs, that it is not in our power to draw them to the conſideration of any thing elſe, how important ſoever. Would we improve ourſelves in ſuch valuable knowledge as will enrich and adorn our minds, and render us uſeful and beneficial to mankind? While this uneaſy paſſion rages in our breaſts, vain and fruitleſs are all our endeavours for that end. It hangs as a weight upon the ſoul,

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ſoul, and retards its flight every moment; it breaks in and diſturbs our meditations; inſenſibly carries off the mind and withdraws the attention, ſo that our haſtened thoughts die before they have arrived at perfection and maturity. Would we apply our minds to the ſtudy of religion, and to the attainment of divine knowledge? To this it is not only neceſſary, that we have all that compoſure which is required to the purſuit of other ſtudies, but that our minds be in ſome meaſure raiſed above the things of the world, before we can acquire a due taſte and reliſh for thoſe heavenly truths, and become fit for the contemplation of things ſpiritual and divine. Again; would we employ ourſelves in the duties of devotion and worſhip? While our minds are groveling here on earth, while with anxious wiſhes we are breathing after its ignoble pleaſures, or indulging immoderate ſorrow for its loſſes and misfortunes; can we have that elevation of ſoul, that ardency of love, that purity of affection

affection which is required in exercises so divine and heavenly? No; our anxious cares will bear down the mind, disjoint our thoughts, cool every holy desire, and render our devotion lifeless, broken and deformed. Further; would we lay ourselves out to be beneficial to our fellow creatures, and employ our time and pains in designs for the good of mankind? This selfish passion will extinguish the generous flame in our breasts, contract our spirits, center all our thoughts upon ourselves, and blast every good and charitable design. While our minds are contracted in melancholy grief for our own misfortunes, can they be enlarged in pity for the miseries of our brethren? While our thoughts and our cares are so much and so anxiously employed about our *own things*, can we also *mind the things of others?* Would we, in short, apply ourselves to the great business of the present life, the preparation of ourselves by virtue and goodness here for the state of perfect happiness and virtue above?

While

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While we indulge ſuch an anxiety for the preſent life, how ready will we be to forget that we are deſigned for another? While the little trifling enjoyments of time enhance our thoughts, or while the want of them diſturbs our peace, and robs our ſouls of reſt, can we have our *converſation in heaven*, or our *affections ſet on the things which are above?* No; we muſt be more thoroughly weaned from the joys and pleaſures of this world, e're the joys which *are at the right hand of God*, and the *pleaſures which are in his preſence for evermore*, can make a due impreſſion on our minds. Thus an immoderate carefulneſs indiſpoſes us for every ſtudy and purſuit which is worthy and excellent. The paſſion might perhaps be allowed to be excuſeable, could we ſay, from experience, that it is ſubſervient to the purpoſes of warding off approaching miſchief, or freeing ourſelves from preſent trouble. But ſo far is it from anſwering either of thoſe ends, or indeed any valuable end whatſoever, that

that it never fails, in proportion to the degrees of exceſs to which we permit it to riſe, to render us incapable of uſing ſkilfully and ſucceſsfully the means of defence or relief, that may be within our power, and adds a double weight to every trouble; which was the

2*d* THING I propoſed to illuſtrate under this head. As a moderate degree of care is of excellent uſe to inſpire us with diligence and induſtry, ſo, if we carry it to that vitious exceſs that is here forbidden, from a wholeſome medicine it becomes a deadly poiſon, and, inſtead of animating a man with ſpirit and activity, it ſpreads a chilling damp upon the ſoul; it enervates all his powers, and as other paſſions puſh on the man to action, this renders him incapable of it. How will ambition, for inſtance, awaken every power within us, to undertake, endure, and accompliſh the greateſt toils and labours, and ruſh from danger to danger to graſp at the wiſh'd

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for honour? How will watchful malice ſet the mind at work to contrive a thouſand ſchemes, for effectuating its baſe, its dark deſigns? Even that ignoble paſſion, avarice, will give our ſouls no reſt, will raiſe us early, and keep us late from ſleep, and transform a lifeleſs ſluggard into a man of buſineſs and activity. But care, ſickly care alone, languiſhes and droops, ſighs and mourns, but cannot riſe to help itſelf. Are we in danger of poverty and want? By induſtry we might, perhaps, ſave ourſelves from the threatening evil: for *the hand of the diligent maketh rich.* But oppreſſive and overwhelming care, unfitting us for buſineſs, brings on with greater quickneſs the evil which we feared. We become like *the ſluggard, whoſe ſoul,* ſaith *Solomon, deſireth, and hath nothing, who hideth his hand in his Boſom, and it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth; whoſe poverty ſhall come upon him as one that travelleth, and his want as an armed man.* Do we think ourſelves in danger of any ſickneſs, which may break

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our conſtitution, or hazard our lives; or do we actually labour under any trouble of which we dread the event; as calmneſs and fortitude of mind is the greateſt preſervative of health, and the greateſt ſupport under ſickneſs, ſo our indulging melancholy fears ſometimes brings on the moſt terrible diſtempers, and frequently makes even ſlighter indiſpoſitions prove fatal in the iſſue. *Heavineſs in the heart of man maketh it to ſtoop, but a ſound heart is the life of the fleſh. A merry heart doth good like a medicine, but a broken ſpirit drieth the bones.* Of all the paſſions then, this immoderate and oppreſſive carefulneſs is the moſt inconſiſtent with common ſenſe and wiſdom. The other paſſions, how irrational and vitious ſoever in themſelves, puſh us on with vigour and activity to obtain their deſired ſatisfaction; this on the other hand fights againſt itſelf; and the more we indulge it, the more it renders us incapable to labour for its ſatisfaction; the deeper it plunges us in the miſery which

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give riſe to it. In the mean time the paſſion itſelf, and all its miſchievous conſequences, riſe in proportion to a greater and more fatal height; which brings me to the

3*d* THING I propoſed under this head; which was to ſhow, that this paſſion, when indulged to exceſs, vitiates our tempers, impairs our faculties, and frequently brings on moſt dreadful deſolation on the ſoul. The man muſt have lived but very little in the world who has not obſerved the bad effects that care and ſollicitude produce, in this way, on the minds of men. How often may we ſee them work the moſt ſurpriſing and melancholy change upon the beſt tempers and diſpoſitions; rob the joyful and the gay of their mirth and humour; turn their laughter into heavineſs of heart; and from being the delight of their friends, make them a burden to themſelves, and to all about them? How oft may we ſee the men of the greateſt calmneſs

neſs and ſerenity of mind, loſe thereby their engaging ſweetneſs, contract a laſting frown on their brows, and become ſour and fretful; and the moſt friendly and benevolent tempers thereby turn harſh and moroſe, ſullen and untractable? Nay, have we not ſeen a courſe of anxiety and carefulneſs extend its dreadful influence to the nobler faculties of the ſoul, and impair the reaſoning and intellectual powers? Has not this gloomy paſſion ſometimes crazed the ſtrongeſt judgment, and ſpread a dark cloud over the fineſt genius and the brighteſt parts? Of this, if our own experience fail us, hiſtory affords us very mournful examples.---Here is a man who, in a high and honourable ſtation of life, has gained the applauſe of the world for his wiſdom, conduct, and all thoſe abilities that can fit one for the diſcharge of the higheſt truſt. He meets with an unexpected, and, perhaps, undeſerved diſgrace. This his proud heart can by no means brook. He retires to a hated obſcurity

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with melancholy, care and diſcontent deep rooted in his mind. Theſe paſſions prey upon his ſoul, and ſoon produce a ſurpriſing change. His reaſon is ſhattered. He is reduced to a mere changeling, and there remain not the leaſt traces of the great man he ſometime was.---To conclude this head; have not care and anxiety ſunk many to the grave itſelf, and made them end their days in the bitterneſs of their ſouls? Nay, have they not in ſome unhappy creatures conquered the love of life, the ſtrongeſt principle of our natures, and driven them, in cruel deſpair, to ſtain their hands in their own blood, and to fly for ſhelter to a hideous death? If then we conſider this carefulneſs in the immediate bad effects it has on our own minds; as it indiſpoſes us for every ſtudy and purſuit which is worthy and excellent, as it renders us incapable of uſing the probable means of obtaining relief from our miſeries; and if we conſider it in thoſe ſtill more dreadful conſequences it ſometimes has on the minds of

of men, we will ſee the folly and ſinfulneſs of indulging ſuch a paſſion in a very clear light. But this will appear yet more fully, if we go on to conſider it in the SERM. II.

2*d* VIEW which I propoſed, as it reſpects Almighty God; where we ſhall find it to be founded on wrong notions of the Deity, and diſhonourable thoughts of the wiſdom and goodneſs of the divine adminiſtration. The firſt, the primary duty we owe to God, is to entertain true and juſt notions of him; to think of him as we ought, to conceive him to be, as he really is, infinite in every perfection. Our entertaining wrong notions of the Deity, our repreſenting him in our minds as cloathed with any imperfection or weakneſs, as it is highly criminal in itſelf, ſo it is the ſource of innumerable evils to the children of men. Now, of all the divine perfections, as goodneſs is the moſt glorious and amiable, and the great foundation of any rational intercourſe man can have with

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his Maker; ſo it eſpecially concerns us to have right notions of this perfection; to have our minds impreſſed with a lively ſenſe of it, and to be eſtabliſhed in the firm perſuaſion, that the divine government, in all its parts, is ever directed by the moſt perfect and invariable goodneſs. Having once attained to ſuch juſt and worthy views of the ſupreme Being, we will naturally ſee it to be our duty to truſt in him, to caſt all our cares upon him, to ſubmit with reſignation and pleaſure to his holy will in all things. As He is the Creator and Governor of heaven and earth, who has an abſolute dominion over us, and all his creatures, we are, no doubt, bound to receive with a humble acquieſcence whatſoever comes from him. *Has not the potter power over the clay? and ſhall the clay ſay to him that faſhioneth it, What dreſt thou?* But if we add to this the conſideration of the infinite goodneſs of God; that the happineſs of his creatures is what he purſues in all his works, in all his diſpenſations;

penſations; that this he deſigns, even in the chaſtiſements and puniſhments with which he viſits the children of men; then there is an infinite force added to the obligation, and a double guilt and wickedneſs to the contrary conduct. Had we no diſcovery made to us of the divine goodneſs, our ſubmiſſion to the will of the Deity would be rather neceſſary than virtuous, and our repining at the divine government would be chargeable rather with madneſs than with vice and impiety. But, ſince we know *that the Lord is good*, and *doth good*, our acquieſcence in his will is built on the moſt noble and rational foundation; and our murmurs and complaints, and the riſings of our heart againſt the conduct of his providence, are no leſs impious than they are irrational. From theſe more general thoughts, we may be able to judge, whether this carefulneſs, of which we are diſcourſing, is conſiſtent with that honour and reverence we owe to the ſupreme Being. Had we right



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notions of God; were we thoroughly convinced, that we are under the protection and conduct of a Being of infinite kindneſs and love; could we indulge our minds in painting out ſcenes of future miſery, as wantonly prepared by Providence to overcloud and darken our future days? Could we allow theſe phantoms, formed by our vain imaginations, to ſour every comfort of life, and deprive our ſouls of reſt? Did we think honourably of him who is Judge over all, would we give looſe reins to our gloomy paſſions? would we indulge deſponding thoughts to an exceſſive height, or allow an overwhelming ſorrow to make havock of our ſouls? No. By ſuch a behaviour we in effect deny that the *Lord is good*, and *that his tender mercies are over all his works*. We diſtruſt his fatherly care and tenderneſs; we doubt whether he will order every thing for the beſt to his creatures; we arraign and impeach his management of things. Every well diſpoſed mind will, no doubt, be frightened at ſuch thoughts

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as theſe, and be ready to deny the charge. But whence then do theſe anxious cares gnaw thy heart, and diſturb thy peace? Why theſe pale looks, theſe down-caſt eyes, theſe ſleepleſs nights and joyleſs days? Were we convinced of the divine goodneſs; did we make *God our refuge and our ſtrength*; with the Pſalmiſt, we ſhould not *be afraid though the earth were removed, and the mountains were caſt into the midſt of the ſea.* With ſouls calm and undiſturbed, we would join with the prophet, *Although the fig-tree ſhould not bloſſom, and the labour of the olive ſhould fail, and there ſhould be no fruit on the vine, although the fields ſhould yield no meat, and the flocks ſhould be cut off from the fold, and there ſhould be no herds in the ſtalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my ſalvation.** SERM. II.

AGAIN, let us examine what paſſes in our minds, when we are indulging this paſſion under any preſent trouble, and we will find ourſelves ſecretly cenſuring the

* Habak. iii. 17, 8.

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management of heaven, and blaming the Judge of all the earth for harſhneſs and partiality. May we not often, in the midſt of our fretting and repining, catch ourſelves employed in ſuch meditations as theſe? Here is a wretched miſer to whom God hath given riches and wealth, yet he hath not the heart to eat thereof; who is ſo much afraid that his eſtate ſhould be uſeful to others, that he is willing that it ſhould be abſolutely uſeleſs to himſelf; while I, who would uſe ſuch a bleſſing for the good of mankind, who would *make the heart of the widow and the fatherleſs to ſing for joy*, am oppreſſed with poverty, and ſtraitened even for the neceſſaries of life. This worthleſs creature again is exalted to greatneſs and honour, fares ſumptuouſly every day, receives the fawning addreſſes of a croud of dependents; while I, who deſerve, and would become theſe things ſo much better, am left to languiſh out a miſerable life in inglorious obſcurity. There is another who is little better than

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a burthen to the earth, and yet is bleſſed with a conſtitution ſtrenuous and robuſt, while I am left to ſtruggle with a crazy body, and the powers of my mind are born down with a load of diſeaſes and pain.--- And what is the neceſſary concluſion from ſuch fine reflections as theſe? Durſt we avow it, it is no leſs than this; how blind are the ways, how unaccountable and capricious is the management of heaven! Thus do vain ſhort-ſighted mortals, oppreſſed with anxious melancholy cares, and at the ſame time puffed up with pride and ſelf-conceit, dare to cenſure the divine conduct, and *charge God fooliſhly*. But, had we worthy notions of God; did we think honourably of his government; did we conceive of him as *delighting to exerciſe loving-kindneſs on the earth*, as pleaſed with the happineſs of his creatures, as purſuing this great deſign through the whole of his adminiſtration, through all theſe ſeemingly dark and gloomy mazes of providence; this would ſpread a ſweet calm and ſere-

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nity over our ſouls, and make us bear the adverſities of our preſent lot with a noble reſignation and courage. Through the darkeſt cloud of ſorrow and trouble we ſhould ſee ſome beams of light and joy. We ſhould be able to trace the divine mercy through every part of our affliction, and ſhould firmly believe, that by theſe, to us the moſt unlikely means, God is carrying on our real and higheſt good. Convinced, that God knows what is good for us, better than we know ourſelves, that he loves us better than we love ourſelves, and careth for us more than we care for ourſelves, we ſhould ſay with good old *Eli*, *It is the Lord, let him do whatſoever ſeemeth unto him good.* *

LITTLE more, I hope, needs be ſaid to ſhow the ſinfulneſs of this paſſion, as it reſpects God, the infinitely wiſe governor and diſpoſer of all things. Let us only conſider, how our giving way to ſuch an anxious fretful temper would be taken by

* 1 Sam. iii. 18.

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any to whom we were ſubject on earth. How diſpleaſing, how affronting would it be to any maſter, if his ſervant (notwithſtanding of the greateſt kindneſs ſhown to him) ſhould on every occaſion appear diſſatisfied with his condition, ſhould grudge and repine at every little hardſhip and inconvenience, and, inſtead of ſerving him with chearfulneſs, ſhould ſhow by his whole behaviour, that he looked upon him as a maſter unjuſt and ſevere? How diſreſpectful and provoking would it be to any earthly prince, if his ſubjects (notwithſtanding of his utmoſt endeavours to promote their happineſs) were perpetually ſhowing their doubts and jealouſies of bad deſigns againſt them; if they ſhould diſcover themſelves uneaſy under his government, and, above all, if they murmured againſt, and reviled his adminiſtration as arbitrary and tyrannical? But with much greater reaſon muſt ſuch a conduct be provoking to God, our heavenly maſter and almighty ſovereign. The beſt of men have

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their failings, their peeviſh humours, their fits of paſſion, which may provoke their ſervants to repining and diſcontent. The beſt, the wiſeſt of princes may commit errors in government, which may diſguſt their people, and alienate their affections. Like other men they are ſometimes led aſtray by their private paſſions. They may truſt too much to undeſerving favourites, and be impoſed on, and led by deſigning men to ſteps the moſt unjuſt and diſhonourable. But He who *reigneth over all is mighty in wiſdom and excellent in council. Behold, he putteth no truſt in his ſervants, and reſpecteth not any that are wiſe in heart. Juſt and true are all his ways*, and *his judgements are mercy and truth. Fury is not in him, nor doth he afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.* But, *as a father chaſteneth his ſon, ſo the Lord our God chaſteneth us, that he may do us good in the latter end.* Now, how provoking would it be to the moſt affectionate tender hearted father, if on every little chaſtiſement his ſon ſhould ſpurn at the

the rod, and afterwards appear before him not with a modeſt bluſh and an ingenuous ſhame for the offence he had given, but with a ſullen angry diſcontent in his looks. *We have had fathers of our fleſh*, ſaith the apoſtle, *which corrected us, and we gave them reverence; ſhall we not much rather be in ſubjection to the Father of ſpirits? For they chaſtened us after their own pleaſure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holineſs.* †

THUS I have endeavoured to ſhow the folly and ſinfulneſs of that exceſſive carefulneſs which is here forbidden by the apoſtle, and I muſt not further encroach on your patience by making any reflections from the ſubject. Let us be perſuaded never to harbour in our breaſts a paſſion, which, as it carries its own puniſhment alongſt with it in the bad effects it has on our minds, ſo it is highly criminal in the ſight of God; a paſſion which has in it as little of wiſdom as it has of innocence, and is the more danger-

† Heb. xii. 9, 10.

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ous, becauſe it deceives us with a falſe appearance of both. We are the children of the moſt loving father, we ſerve the kindeſt of maſters, and are under the government and protection of a God of infinite mercy and everlaſting love. Let us truſt in his goodneſs for evermore, and *commit our ways to him*; and he will be a *ſtrength to us in our diſtreſs, a refuge from the ſtorm, and a ſhadow from the heat.* Let us in every circumſtance of life endeavour to maintain ſuch a chearful compoſure of mind, ſuch a fortitude and magnanimity as becomes the dignity of our rational nature; as is neceſſary to its perfection and happineſs; and will be the beſt evidence, that we think honourably of him in *whoſe hand our life and our breath are, and whoſe are all our ways.* Let us remember, and put in practice the direction of the apoſtle to make our *requeſts known unto God by prayer and ſupplication with thankſgiving*; and let us implore the aſſiſtance of the divine grace to enable us to *poſſeſs our ſouls in patience, and to teach*

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*us in whatever ſtate we are therewith to be content.* I ſhall conclude this diſcourſe with the excellent paſſage of our Saviour's ſermon on the mount; *Matth.* vi. *Take no thought for your life, what ye ſhall eat, or what ye ſhall drink, nor for the body wherewithal ye ſhall be clothed. Behold the fowls of the air, for they ſow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his ſtature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Conſider the lilies of the fields how they grow; they toil not, neither do they ſpin, and yet I ſay unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of theſe. Wherefore, if God ſo clothe the graſs of the field, which to day is, and tomorrow is caſt into the oven, ſhall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, ſaying, what ſhall we eat, or what ſhall we drink, or wherewithal ſhall we be clothed. For your heavenly father knoweth that ye have need of all theſe things. But ſeek ye firſt the kingdom of*

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*of God and his righteouſneſs, and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you. Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow; for the morrow ſhall take thought for the things of itſelf. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.*

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# SERMON III.

## RELIGION the beſt Support under the TROUBLES of LIFE.

PSALM XCIV. 19.

*In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my ſoul.*

NO miſtake concerning religion has been attended with more hurtful and unhappy conſequences, than the opinion that it preſcribes a joyleſs and melancholy courſe of life; engaging in which, we muſt bid farewel to every pleaſure and comfort. This falſe and groundleſs opinion we are too ready to take up in our early years, when our taſte for pleaſure and enjoyment is keeneſt; and frequently it has a laſting influence to render religion an object of our averſion through the reſt of life. Religion we generally

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admit to be of ſome importance as to the world to come; but we look upon it as a reſtraint upon our liberty, and an interruption to our pleaſures in the preſent life: and it is no eaſy matter to perſuade men, that their happineſs here depends on their following its inſtructions and precepts. Nothing however is more certain, not only from the moſt expreſs declarations of God, but from the nature and reaſon of the thing itſelf, than that religion is the true bleſſedneſs of life; that the *ways of wiſdom are the* only *ways of pleaſantneſs, and that her paths* alone *are the paths of peace.* It is religion that gives a ſweet reliſh to every comfort of life; that qualifies us for enjoying external pleaſures with true ſatisfaction and peace of mind, and thereby carries our imperfect happineſs here to its greateſt poſſible height. As it thus increaſes the real value of all other good things, ſo it is the only real and effectual ſupport under the manifold evils and

and afflictions of life. Whether pleaſure or pain, happineſs or miſery, has upon the whole the aſcendant in the life of man, is what I will not preſume to determine; but ſurely, whoever conſiders to what a variety of ſorrows we are liable, and how many afflictions every man, in the ordinary courſe of things, may reaſonably lay his account with, muſt admit that religion is valuable in the higheſt degree, if it has this effect to make the troubles of life ſit eaſy upon us, and to enable us to bear them with patience and with chearfulneſs.

To ſhow you that religion really has this bleſſed influence, is the ſubject I am naturally led to from the words of the text; where the pſalmiſt, who, in the courſe of his life, had met with a variety of troubles and afflictions, declares his own experience. *In the multitude of my thoughts within me,* ſays he, *thy comforts delight my ſoul.* Amidſt all my fears and

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cares, my pains and ſorrows, thou makeſt peace and gladneſs to reign within: I find in thy ſervice a perpetual ſource of delight and joy.

WHAT I propoſe then, is to repreſent, how the practice of religion and holineſs ſupports a good man, and affords him comfort and delight under all the evils and calamities of life; which I hope will be abundantly plain from the conſideration of the following particulars.

I. RELIGION moderates our love of the world, reſtrains our affections from the eager purſuit of its enjoyments, and thereby enables us to bear with greater patience its evils and afflictions, and prevents immoderate ſorrow and dejection under them.

II. THE practice of true religion affords ſuch immediate delight and pleaſure, as in a great meaſure ſupplies the want of any

any outward enjoyment, and allays the pain of any worldly diſtreſs. SERM. III.

III. RELIGION, as it teaches that all things are ordered by the moſt perfect wiſdom and goodneſs, ſo it particularly aſſures every good man, that all things ſhall work together for his real intereſt.

IV. RELIGION gives us the bleſſed proſpect of a happy end to all our ſorrows, and of reſt from all our labours in the life which is to come.

V. RELIGION intitles us to the gracious influences of the Spirit of God, by which we are enabled to apply all theſe things to our comfort, and to *rejoice in the Lord always.*

I SHALL endeavour, as briefly as I can, to illuſtrate theſe ſeveral conſiderations, and conclude with ſome practical reflections on the whole.

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I. THE firſt thing I mentioned was, that religion moderates our love of the world, and reſtrains our affections from the eager purſuit of its enjoyments, thereby enabling us with greater patience to bear its afflictions, and preventing immoderate ſorrow and dejection under them.

MAY not we here begin, with lamenting the wretched folly of that great part of mankind, who ſeek their happineſs and chuſe their portion here, preferring the tranſient enjoyments of time to thoſe that are durable and eternal. Did this their choice exempt them from the evils, and raiſe them above the viciſſitudes to which our mortal ſtate is liable; were it indeed the caſe, as *David* once thought it was, that they were *not plagued like other men, nor chaſtened as others be*; then were this their conduct more excuſable: but alas! not only are they expoſed in common with others to thoſe troubles which belong to the lot of mankind, but moreover, the warm indul-

indulgence of their ſeveral paſſions, and the fond purſuit of earthly pleaſures, will always be found to multiply their griefs, and, by a train of neceſſary conſequences, to become bitterneſs in the latter end. It is a truth certain and undoubted, that the enjoyments which theſe men purſue, in which they ſeek for happineſs, are variable and fugitive, ſhort and uncertain. Their moſt promiſing hopes may ſoon be blaſted; their riches may *take to themſelves wings, and fly away*; or ſickneſs may render their enjoyments taſteleſs and inſipid, and imbitter their lives in the midſt of the greateſt affluence. Now, if all things here below are ſo changeable and fleeting, how wretched muſt they be, who ſet their whole hearts upon them, and have no higher views than the attainment of the honours, pleaſures and riches of life? To men, whoſe ſupreme delight is placed in ſuch precarious enjoyments, the loſs of them muſt prove the moſt dreadful ſtroke. The calamities of life muſt fall upon them with

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with double weight, and they have nothing left to ſupport them from ſinking under them. Thus it is, and thus it muſt always be with ſuch men, when viſited with the loſſes and diſappointments, the evils and troubles of the world.

BUT how different is the caſe with him whoſe mind is informed and ruled by the dictates of religion; which corrects our miſtaken notions, reclaims our wandering affections, and fixes them on objects which alone are worthy of our nature. Religion teaches us to conſider this life as a ſhort paſſage to our laſting and unchangeable ſtate; to look on this world, as only the *houſe of our pilgrimage*, from which we are to paſs on towards heaven, the manſion of eternal reſt. Religion calls upon us to remember, that *our life is but a vapour*; that *the faſhion of this world paſſeth away*; and accordingly, that we are not to ſet up our reſt here. Religion teaches us, that when we begin to live, we ſhould learn to die,

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to look beyond this vain world to a ſtate of more laſting and glorious exiſtence. How certain is it that the man whoſe proſpects and views of things are thus enlarged, who has his eye fixed on a *better country, even an heavenly*, as his paſſions of courſe will not be ſo much engaged with the things of the world, ſo he will bear the evils and afflictions of it with greater evenneſs and compoſure of mind than others? He knows that there is no proportion between this and the future ſtate of things; and therefore, neither the troubles nor enjoyments of life, will appear to him of ſuch importance as to diſturb his peace or to turn him aſide from the ſteady purſuit of his true happineſs. But beſides, religion not only moderates our affection to the things of the world as ſhort and fleeting, and bearing no proportion to the immortality of our ſouls; but by a further conſideration it corrects our attachment to the world, as not only a fooliſh and mean, but an extremely dangerous

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paſſion. *Love not the world*, ſays the apoſtle, *neither the things that are in the world; for if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* We are taught, that the indulging ſuch a paſſion *wars againſt the ſoul*; that *to be carnally minded is death*, and excludes us from the kingdom of heaven; that we muſt be freed *from the corruptions that are in the world through luſt, if we would be partakers of the divine nature*; that we muſt not entangle ourſelves with worldly cares, if we would behave ourſelves as *good ſoldiers of Jeſus Chriſt*, and *fight the good fight of faith:* in ſhort, religion enjoins us, *to have our converſation in heaven*; and, as already *fellow citizens with the ſaints*, to be learning betimes to take delight in the ſame exerciſes, and to reliſh the ſame pleaſures with them, if ever we expect to be received into their bleſſed ſociety above. And now, how can he whoſe mind is ruled by ſuch principles as theſe, and whoſe affections are purified by ſuch a diſcipline, be ſubject to thoſe furious paſſions, which the

the diſtreſſes of life ſo often raiſe in the minds of others? Whence flow thoſe oppreſſive cares, that ſorrow and melancholy, that overwhelm the minds of men, but from a fond admiration of the things of the world, from an immoderate attachment to the pleaſures of life, from mens being lovers of worldly riches more than lovers of God? Thoſe diſturbing paſſions ſurely cannot find place in his heart, whoſe *treaſure is in heaven*; whoſe *affections* are *ſet on things above*; and who looks on every worldly thing as contemptible and low, when compared with the favour of God, and that reward which he has laid up for his faithful ſervants. Thus much then for the firſt particular.

II. THE next thing I mentioned was, that the practice of religion affords ſuch immediate delight and pleaſure, as in great meaſure ſupplies the want of any outward enjoyment, and allays the pain of wordly diſtreſs. Religion does not require,

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quire, nor do we pretend that it produces an abſolute inſenſibility under the troubles of life. We plead not that health and ſickneſs, wealth and indigence, honour and diſgrace will be things indifferent to a good man. They who have carried the matter to this romantic height ſeem to have been ignorant of the eſſential principles and conſtitution of human nature, with which a deſire of pleaſure and an averſion to pain are ſo interwoven, that by no means they can be rooted out nor changed. But granting that theſe natural appetites and feelings are inſurmountable, and that no man, by any influence of religion, can be altogether freed from an afflicting ſenſe of the evils of life; yet here is an undoubted advantage of piety, and a privilege peculiar to good men, that they have a certain ſtock of pleaſure and enjoyment, independent of the body, and of all the viciſſitudes of time; which neither ſickneſs nor poverty, nor all the envy and malice of vitious men can rob them of. To theſe pleaſures

pleaſures they have acceſs, when every external enjoyment is gone. They find in them the moſt delightful entertainment to their minds; ſuch as makes them forget their ſorrows and wants, nay, ſuch as makes them even to rejoice in the midſt of the heavieſt afflictions. That refined delight which attends the exerciſes of religion, that bleſſed peace and ſerenity of mind which is the natural and conſtant effect of the practice of goodneſs, ſupport and revive the ſervants of God, when all things around them are moſt black and threatning.

How miſerable muſt he be who is a ſtranger to religion and to its comforts, who knows no other bleſſing than what the outward enjoyments of life can afford him! He ſeeks but one ſpring of happineſs, and that a ſcanty one too, and when this is dried up, as ſoon it may, he falls into a condition the moſt diſconſolate and forlorn. Let us ſuppoſe him reduced to want and indigence,

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gence, or afflicted with pain and ſickneſs; what entertainments has he? what relief can he fly to? what courſe has he left him? None, but to lye brooding over his ſorrows, and to torture himſelf with thoughts of thoſe evils, which he can neither remove nor endure. Should he turn his eyes inward, there will open to him a black ſcene of folly and of guilt, and he will be glad to think of any thing rather than himſelf. Should he lift his eyes to God, who before was ſcarce in all his thoughts; what relief or pleaſure can he have in the contemplation of that power which he has defied, that juſtice which he has provoked, that goodneſs which he has abuſed and trampled on! Well may we apply to wicked men when under affliction, what we find *Moſes* threatning the *Iſraelites* with as the certain conſequences of their rebellion; *Thou ſhalt have no eaſe* ſays he, *neither ſhall the ſole of thy foot have reſt; for the Lord ſhall give thee a trembling heart and failing of eyes, and ſorrow of mind; and thy life ſhall hang*

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*doubt before thee; and thou ſhalt fear day and night, and ſhalt have none aſſurance of thy life. In the morning thou ſhalt ſay, would God it were evening; and in the evening thou ſhalt ſay, would God it were morning; for the fear of thy heart wherewith thou ſhalt fear, and for the ſight of thine eyes which thou ſhalt ſee.* † *There is no peace,* ſaith the prophet, *unto the wicked, for they are like unto the troubled ſea which cannot reſt, whoſe waters caſt forth mire and dirt.* Let us now, on the other hand, ſuppoſe a pious man beſet with the evils of life, and in a ſituation, to all appearance, the moſt miſerable and deſtitute; yet he enjoys a bleſsful calm and tranquillity within, which affords him a delight ſuperior to all the noiſy and empty pleaſures of the world. Hence it is that *Solomon* tells us, that the *good man is ſatisfied of himſelf*; and that *the work of righteouſneſs* is ſaid *to be peace, and the effect of righteouſneſs, quietneſs and aſſurance for ever.* He has a variety of worthy employments and noble exerciſes to which he may betake

† Deut. xxviii. 65, 66, 67.

himſelf,

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himſelf, and which not only divert the mind from the preſent feeling of trouble, but in themſelves afford him a high meaſure of ſatisfaction and joy. He will take delight in approaching to God, and the *meditation of him ſhall be ſweet unto his ſoul.* When compared with this and the pleaſures that flow from it, all the little artifices, the trifling amuſements which the men of the world can have recourſe to, in order to lull aſleep their griefs, are but miſerable comforters. The contemplation of Him who is the perfection of beauty, the fountain of excellence, muſt in itſelf be a delightful exerciſe to the truly pious. Nor will his underſtanding only be employed in contemplating the loveliеſt object, his affections alſo will be running out towards God; he will feel his heart warmed with love and gratitude, and inſpired with truſt and confidence in him; his meditations will be accompanied with the pureſt and moſt exalted devotion; and it is this devout intercourſe with God which

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is the great refreſhment and ſupport of good men under all the evils and troubles of life. It is thus, that *in the multitude of thoughts within them, his comforts delight their ſoul.* For, is it not a ſenſible conſolation to us, when in diſtreſs and perplexity, to have a ſure and faithful friend, into whoſe boſom we may pour our cares and ſorrows, who may comfort, direct and adviſe us, and by his tender friendly ſympathy may eaſe us of half our burden? How happy then muſt a pious man be, who in all his diſtreſſes may have his recourſe to God; the moſt faithful, affectionate, all-ſufficient friend; ever ready to hear and willing to help us; who *deſpiſes not, nor abhors the affliction of the afflicted*; who invites us to *pour out our hearts before him*, and has promiſed to be a *ſtrength to us in our diſtreſs, a refuge from the ſtorm*, and *a ſhadow from the heat.* Thus then I hope it appears, that religion affords the ſervant of God ſuch ſpiritual joys and pleaſures, as will in great meaſure ſupply the

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want of other enjoyments, and leſſen the weight of any ſorrow. Is he reduced to want and indigence? he has a good conſcience, which is *a perpetual feaſt*; and he can join with the Pſalmiſt, *There be many that ſay, Who will ſhew us any good? Thou haſt put gladneſs in my heart, more than when their corn and their wine abounded.* Is he harraſſed by the envy and malice of thoſe about him? he enjoys peace with his Creator, and friendſhip with himſelf. Is he forſaken by friend and brother? one friend ſtill remains who *changeth not:* he finds in his experience, that the Lord *forſaketh not his ſaints*, and *that none that truſt in him ſhall be deſolate.*---Is his body weakly and languiſhing? his ſoul may notwithſtanding be vigorous and free, may raiſe itſelf above this world, converſe with its eternal Creator, and taſte of pleaſures, which thoſe the body miniſters, when in all its health and ſoundneſs, can never equal.

III. THE

III. THE next thing mentioned, in order to ſhow that religion is our great ſupport under the afflictions of life, was this, that as religion teaches us, that all things are ordered by the moſt perfect wiſdom and goodneſs, ſo it particularly aſſures every good man, that all things *ſhall work together for his good.* Without the knowledge and belief of an infinitely perfect Being, the Creator and Governor of the world, we would neceſſarily have the moſt melancholy views of human nature and human life. Let us repreſent to ourſelves a poor helpleſs animal brought into being, ignorant of his origin, and of the end for which he is formed; ſurrounded on all hands with darkneſs; ſubject to a thouſand anxieties and troubles, pains and diſtreſſes, which he can neither prevent nor cure; feeling violent inclinations which can never be ſatisfied; endowed with ſo much reaſon, as to make his miſery the more complete by the exquiſite perception of it; and after a few years of this wretch-

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ed exiſtence, returning to the duſt, and dying like the beaſts that periſh. This, my friends, is the beſt notion we can form of ourſelves, if we exclude from our thoughts the Supreme Being, *whoſe we are*, and on whom we depend. But when we conſider ourſelves as the creatures and ſubjects of the great and good God; all whoſe ways, tho' by us unſearchable, we know to be in righteouſneſs and truth; who has the moſt tender concern for the welfare of his creatures, and purſues this as his great end thro' the whole of his divine adminiſtration; when we believe that nothing can befal us here, but what is ordered by the moſt conſummate wiſdom and the moſt boundleſs goodneſs, nothing but what, if rightly improven, will turn out to our real intereſt and advantage: this inſtantly brightens the ſcene; this affords a moſt comfortable proſpect of things, and may juſtly ſupport our minds under the various evils which we are here expoſed to. When all things around us

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are dark and gloomy, how rejoicing is the thought, that there is one who ſits at the helm of the world to govern and direct every event, to bring light out of darkneſs, and order out of ſeeming confuſion! When we ſee nothing before us but the diſmal proſpect of approaching miſery, and our minds are ready to ſink under ſad apprehenſions and forebodings; what conſolation muſt it yield us, to know that our concerns are all in the beſt and ſafeſt hands, and are under the care and management of him, who is *mighty in wiſdom*, and whoſe *tender mercies are over all his works!* When our minds are perplexed and confounded with the ſtrange and ſeemingly inconſiſtent appearances in the preſent ſtate of things, how comfortable muſt the reflexion be, that tho' we, ſhort-ſighted creatures, cannot comprehend it, yet the whole makes up one regular ſyſtem, worthy of the great and righteous Ruler of all! Well therefore may we join with the Pſalmiſt, *The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice,*

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*rejoice*, and let *the multitude of the iſles be glad thereof. Clouds and darkneſs are round about him, but righteouſneſs and judgment are the habitation of his throne.* *

BUT a general aſſurance of the wiſdom and goodneſs of the divine adminiſtration is not all the comfort which good men have under the troubles of life. Beſides this, they have the moſt expreſs declarations and promiſes of God, that *all things ſhall work together for their good* in particular; and that whatever may befal others, yet *ſurely it ſhall be well with them that fear the Lord.* He has promiſed that he *will prevent them with the bleſſings of his goodneſs*, and *with his favour encompaſs them about as with a ſhield. How great is thy goodneſs, O Lord, which thou haſt laid up for thoſe that fear thee, which thou haſt wrought for thoſe that truſt in thee, before the ſons of men! Thou ſhalt hide them in the ſecret of thy preſence from the pride of man, thou ſhalt keep them in a pavilion from the*

* Pſal. xcvii. 1, 2.

*ſtrife*

*ſtrife of tongues. The ſalvation of the righteous is of the Lord, he is their ſtrength in time of trouble; he ſhall deliver them in ſix troubles, and in ſeven there ſhall no evil touch them: in famine he ſhall redeem them from death, and in war from the power of the ſword. The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to ſhow himſelf ſtrong in behalf of them whoſe heart is perfect towards him.* Now, tho' theſe and the like promiſes of God's peculiar favour to good men are not ſo to be underſtood, as if they were to be entirely exempted from thoſe troubles to which the reſt of mankind are liable; or as if theſe afflictions were not to have their natural effects on them as well as others: yet this much they muſt ſurely import, that good men, when under the evils of life, are in a ſituation widely different from that of wicked men, when under the ſame evils; and that the righteous have grounds of ſtrong conſolation which others know nothing of. They know that all the afflictions they

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they are viſited with here, are deſigned for the moſt wiſe and gracious ends. They behold them as the kind chaſtiſements of an affectionate father, which are by him diſpenſed, in order to correct their failings, to quicken them in their duty, to exerciſe their graces, and to ſtrengthen their faith and truſt in God. They look on them as excellent medicines applied to cure the maladies of their ſouls, to check the wandering of their affections, to raiſe them above this world, and make them aſpire after pleaſures more exalted and ſublime. It is in this light that we always find the afflictions of the people of God repreſented in ſcripture: *when the righteous are holden in the cords of affliction*, ſaith *Elihu*, *then God ſheweth them their work and their tranſgreſſion, that they have exceeded; he openeth alſo their ear to diſcipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity.** We have a long and excellent reaſoning on this ſubject in the epiſtle to the *Hebrews* xii. 7. where the apoſtle hav-

* Job xxxvi. 8, 9, 10.

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ing ſhown God's wiſe and gracious deſigns in viſiting his people with afflictions, very properly ſubjoins this exhortation, *Therefore lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees.* And indeed, my brethren, muſt not the man who beholds all the evils and calamities of life in ſuch a light as this, bear them in quite another manner, and with much more compoſure and fortitude, than it is poſſible for the men of the world to do? Well may he *count it all joy when he falls into divers temptations, as knowing that the trying of his faith worketh patience, that he may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing.* Thus find we the ſaints in ſcripture expreſſing their truſt and confidence in God under trouble, in language the moſt ſtrong and ſublime. *The Lord,* ſays the Pſalmiſt, *is my light and my ſalvation, whom ſhall I fear? the Lord is the ſtrength of my life, of whom ſhall I be afraid? In God have I put my truſt, I will not fear what man can do unto me. God is our refuge and our ſtrength,* ſays he elſewhere,

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where, *and therefore I will not fear though the earth be removed, and the mountains be caſt into the midſt of the ſea.* But the conſolation, which truſt in God and in the divine promiſes affords to good men, is better felt, than it can be poſſibly expreſt in words; it is their cordial under all diſeaſes, their light under all darkneſs, their antidote againſt all the plagues of the world: *The peace of God which paſſeth all underſtanding, keeping their hearts and minds through Jeſus Chriſt.* By means of this, their ſpirits are not only born up in the midſt of all the waves and billows of affliction, but they are made to look beyond the tempeſt to a ſafe and quiet ſhore; they triumph in the aſſured proſpect of deliverance, and are enabled to *rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.*

IV. WHICH leads me to the fourth head of diſcourſe, that religion gives us the bleſſed proſpect of a happy end of all our ſorrows, and a reſt from all our labours in the

the life which is to come. Sometimes, no doubt, the cloud is ſo dark over good men, the ſtorm beats upon them ſo furiouſly, and they are ſo beſet behind and before, that were it not for this delightful proſpect, other conſiderations would avail but little to bear up their minds under the preſſure of affliction. Hence the inſpired apoſtle, when ſpeaking of the trials and perſecutions of the firſt Chriſtians, uſes that expreſſion, *If in this life only we had hope, we were of all men moſt miſerable.* And indeed, what leſs than the glorious hope of eternal bliſs could have ſupported men, who were conſtantly expoſed to the deriſion, hatred and cruelty of mankind; who were enduring ſtripes and chains, wearineſs and hunger, cold and nakedneſs, who were continually in perils and dangers, and who could expect to end this life of ſorrows only by a violent and ſhameful death? Accordingly we find that our Lord and his apoſtles uſually adduce this conſideration of an everlaſting reward, as the only

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only motive of ſufficient force in ſuch a diſmal caſe. *Bleſſed are they*, ſays our Saviour, *who are perſecuted for righteouſneſs ſake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Bleſſed are ye, when all men ſhall revile you, and perſecute you, and ſhall ſay all manner of evil falſely againſt you for my ſake; rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.** *Be ye patient*, ſaith the apoſtle, *and ſtabliſh your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*† Now tho', by the goodneſs of God to us, we are not generally expoſed to ſuch dreadful ſufferings, as our brethren were expoſed to in the firſt days of the goſpel; yet, no doubt, it is ſometimes the lot even of the beſt of men, to be placed in ſuch diſaſtrous circumſtances, in ſuch extremity of pain and anguiſh, that nothing but the proſpect of heaven could keep them from the greateſt dejection of mind. But this glorious hope entirely changes the face of things; it makes all their preſent *affiictions*, how heavy ſoever they may be, to ſeem *light*; and

*Matth. v. 10, 11, 12. † James v. 8.

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how long ſoever they may laſt, to appear as enduring *but for a moment*, in compariſon of that *far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*. Death, tho' naturally dreadful to mankind, they will welcome as the happy period of all their griefs, the cure of all their diſeaſes, the victory over all their enemies; and will look forward with pleaſure thro' the dark and gloomy vale, into that happy land where they ſhall *reſt from all their labours, and their works ſhall follow them*; where *God ſhall wipe away all tears from their eyes*; and *there ſhall be no more death, neither ſorrow nor crying, neither ſhall there be any more pain*; where the righteous *ſhall hunger no more, neither thirſt any more, neither ſhall the ſun light on them, nor any heat*; where *former things ſhall be done away, and all things ſhall become new*. Looking upon this ſtate of ſucceeding exiſtence in no other light, than as a complete deliverance from all the troubles of the preſent life, it muſt needs afford the higheſt conſolation to good men;

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men; and as they approach nearer to it, they may *lift up their heads with joy*, as knowing that *the day of their redemption* is at hand. But muſt it not have ſtill a more powerful influence to ſupport and gladden their ſouls, when they conſider, that then they ſhall not only be for ever redeemed from all their ſorrows, but ſhall receive an unſpeakable reward of glory and endleſs bliſs? *Eye hath not ſeen, nor hath ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what God hath laid up for thoſe that love him.* Who can now comprehend the happineſs that muſt flow from perfect knowledge, joined with perfect goodneſs; from the ſociety of angels, and of the *ſpirits of juſt men made perfect*; from our enjoyment of God himſelf, and our union with the fountain of all goodneſs! If in this life good men have been loaded with reproach and diſgrace, there ſhall they be made *kings and prieſts unto God*, and be crowned with *glory, honour and immortality*; if here they have been born down with

with poverty and want, there is reſerved for them an inheritance *eternal and incorruptible*; a *treaſure which moth or ruſt do not corrupt*, and where no *thieves break through and ſteal*. If here they have been made to paſs through the furnace of affliction, and through pain and ſickneſs; if they have had weariſom days and nights appointed for them; there ſhall they *obtain joy and gladneſs*, they ſhall flouriſh in immortal youth, and be clothed with ſtrength and vigour incapable of decay; when *this corruptible ſhall have put on incorruption, and this mortal ſhall have put on immortality, and death ſhall be ſwallowed up in victory*. Inſpired with this bleſſed hope, how well may they *rejoice in the midſt of tribulation*, and with what courage may they bear the hardſhips and difficulties of the way, which they know will ſoon lead them to everlaſting reſt and joy! What labour and toil will not men endure; what danger will they not chearfully encounter, when animated with the expectation of acquiring

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ing ſome fading worldly good? Ought not then the proſpect of the celeſtial bliſs to have a much ſtronger influence to ſupport our minds under the evils and calamities of life; ſince, with ſo much certainty, we can conclude with the apoſtle, that *the ſufferings of the preſent time, are not worthy to be compared with the glory that ſhall afterwards be revealed.*

V. THE laſt thing I mentioned, to ſhow you how religion is the ſource of comfort under afflictions, was this: that it intitles us to the gracious influences of the Spirit of God, which enables us to apply, in a due manner, the grounds of comfort which religion affords, and to *rejoice in the Lord always.* The neceſſity of our being directed by a ſuperior principle in the ways of truth and goodneſs, reaſon itſelf may deduce from the preſent weakneſs of our natures, and the unhappy biaſs which ſo early appears in us to the crooked paths of error and vice. The ancient philoſo-

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pher, is acknowleged to have deeply ſtudied human nature, who laid it down as a maxim, that no man could arrive at eminent virtue without the inſpiration of God. Agreeably to this, the divine revelation every where aſcribes the beginning, the progreſs and perfection of the religious life to the benign influences of the ſpirit of God, and aſſures us that it is God who *worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleaſure*. As this bleſſed aid is neceſſary for us at all times, ſo in a particular manner in the day of diſtreſs and trouble; then the divine grace muſt be *ſufficient for us*, or our own weakneſs will ſoon betray us. The afflictions we are here expoſed to, the ſacred writers very properly repreſent as trials and temptations; it being extremely difficult to behave in a right manner under them, and not to be led into ſin and folly, to impatience and fretfulneſs, to murmuring and repining againſt God. Moſt ſeaſonably, therefore, in ſuch circumſtances, is a divine aid provided for us, by the promiſe

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of the ſpirit of God to them that ſincerely ask it. He aſſures us that *they who are the ſons of God ſhall be led by the ſpirit of God*; and to point out to us the happy effects of his influence and conduct, when we are under diſtreſs and trouble, he has promiſed the ſpirit under the particular character of the *Comforter that ſhould abide with us for ever*. It is by this ſpirit, *the Comforter*, that good men are armed with patience, contentment and fortitude under all their troubles; and are made to *rejoice in tribulation, the power of Chriſt reſting on them*. By him they are made to delight in the exerciſes of religion, and to taſte therein a *joy* and *peace that is unſpeakable*, quieting all the griefs and ſorrows of their hearts. By him they are *rooted and grounded in faith and love*, and made to know what is *the hope of God's calling*, and what *the riches of the glory of his inheritance*. *Joy* and *peace*, are the fruits of the ſpirit; and it is *through the power of the Holy Ghoſt*, we are ſaid to *abound in hope, and to be filled with joy and peace*

*peace in believing.* Theſe happy effects of the holy ſpirit, the firſt profeſſors of our religion fully experienced in all their ſufferings for the cauſe of Chriſt; and as their *ſufferings abounded,* their *conſolations alſo abounded by Chriſt,* ſo that they even *rejoiced that they were accounted worthy to ſuffer ſhame for his ſake.* The ſame ſpirit, with all his gracious influences, is ſtill promiſed, and will certainly be beſtowed on every ſincere Chriſtian. Many I hope there are who can bear witneſs to the goodneſs and faithfulneſs of God in this reſpect; who under the greateſt afflictions have found themſelves upheld and comforted by an inviſible power, and when deſtitute of earthly comforts have found that the *conſolations of the Lord are neither few nor ſmall.* SERM. III.

THUS having endeavoured to explain and illuſtrate the ſeveral particulars by which I propoſed to ſhow, that religion and goodneſs is the great ſource of

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comfort under the afflictions of life, I ſhould now conclude with ſome practical reflections on the whole. Here allow me only to obſerve, that the deſign and the natural improvement of this diſcourſe is to incite us to the ſerious ſtudy and practice of holineſs and piety. Many and various are the motives ſet before us, to perſuade us to this; and what we have been inſiſting on, is none of the leaſt conſiderable. Where is the man, who can reaſonably promiſe himſelf to paſs through this valley of tears, without taſting of its ſorrows? Neither the higheſt pitch of greatneſs, nor the loweſt obſcurity, can exempt us from this common fate of all the children of men. Would we then, my brethren, be prepared to bear, with chearfulneſs and fortitude, thoſe calamities which we cannot avoid? Would we arm ourſelves againſt the arrows of affliction which are every where flying around us, and aim'd at our peace? let us take to ourſelves the buckler of religion and virtue;

tue; let us ſeriouſly apply ourſelves to the exerciſe of holineſs, and this we ſhall find to be the beſt defence. Could we once take delight in communion with God; were the *meditation of him ſweet unto our ſouls*; this would lay aſleep our ſorrows and fears; this would calm the ſtorm in our breaſts, and raiſe us above the world and all its anxious cares. Were we approving ourſelves as faithful ſervants unto God, then might we challenge, and, with humble confidence, reſt upon theſe *great and precious promiſes* he has given to good men. Were we *abounding in the work of the Lord, ſtedfaſt and immoveable* in his ſervice, then we might derive the moſt powerful conſolation from knowing that our *labour ſhould not be in vain in the Lord.* What an indifference about all things here below; what patience and contentment under all our burthens; what an heroick courage under all dangers; what joy, what triumph would be the natural, the bleſſed effect of our looking forward to that day, when all

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our ſorrows ſhall have an end; when we ſhall be placed beyond the reach of poverty, diſtreſs and pain, and be poſſeſſed of that *fulneſs of joy* which is *at the right hand of God*, and theſe *rivers of pleaſure* which are in *his preſence for evermore?* Such would be the bleſſed effects of the practice of religion: and is not this ſufficient to make us love it, and purſue it, that when the calamities of life overtake us, the Lord may then *be our ſtrength and our defence*, and *in the multitude of our thoughts within us, his comforts may delight our ſouls?*

HAVE we not here, my friends, a loud call to all the ſons and daughters of affliction; to ſeek relief where it is only to be found; to all the *weary* and *the heavy laden, to come unto God, that they may find reſt unto their ſouls?* Nay, to thoſe who have not as yet taſted of the evils of the world; who are yet in the joyful ſpring of life, ought not this ſtrongly to recommend the good ways

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of the Lord? ——You may flatter yourſelves with hopes of uninterrupted happineſs, and form to yourſelves imaginary ſchemes, where one pleaſure ſhall ſtill be ſucceeding another. You are unwilling, I know, that any thing gloomy or ſorrowful ſhould enter into your views of life: but, alas! theſe are vain deceitful dreams. As your enjoyments, at the beſt will be faint and languid, fleeting and tranſitory, ſo your joy will be chequered with ſorrow, and your pleaſure mingled with grief. You know not, you cannot know, how much pain and ſickneſs, how much diſtreſs and want, how much affliction and miſery may be yet before you in life. The leſs you look for ſuch things, they will be the heavier when they come: if you are not guarded and armed againſt them, they will oppreſs you with double violence, and you will be ready to ſink under their weight. Now 'tis religion alone, and the devoting yourſelves to the ſervice of God, that can ſupport you under the trials of the world, and conduct

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duct you thro' human life with ſafety and peace. They alone *ſhall be eſtabliſhed in perfect peace whoſe minds are ſtayed on God.* Are you entering upon a life ſo expoſed to diſtreſſes and plagues, and will you not carry alongſt with you this antidote, this cordial? a life, where one ſorrow ſhall ſucceed another, and will you neglect this beſt ſource of tranquillity and comfort? *Get wiſdom therefore, and with all your getting, get underſtanding: for happy is the man that findeth wiſdom; the merchandiſe of it is better than the merchandiſe of ſilver, and the gain thereof, than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canſt deſire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand, are riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her paths are peace.**

* Prov. iii. 13, 14, 15, 16.

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# SERMON IV.

## The Chriſtian Religion the greateſt Bleſſing to MANKIND.

COLOSSIANS i. 12, 13.

*Giving thanks unto the Father,—who hath delivered us from the power of darkneſs, and hath tranſlated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.*

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IT is very obſervable, that we have the juſteſt ſenſe of the true value of thoſe bleſſings, of which we have ſometime felt the want, and were thereby made ſenſible how neceſſary they are to our happineſs. Theſe things, on the other hand, of which we have had a long uninterrupted enjoyment, how great and valuable ſoever in themſelves, make but a very faint impreſſion on us. We become, in a manner, inſenſible of their worth; and are neither careful

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careful to improve them in a right manner, nor duly thankful to God for beſtowing them. There is nothing in which this wrong judgment, this weakneſs of our nature, appears more evidently, than in our manner of thinking concerning the Chriſtian religion. It is an ineſtimable treaſure which we have all our life enjoyed. We never knew what it was to want it: and thence it comes to paſs, that few of us have a deſervedly high eſtimation of its great excellency. Moſt people think of it with a cold indifference; and ſome have not ſcrupled to declare before the world, that they look upon the religion of Jeſus as a ſuperfluous inſtitution, of little or no real uſe to mankind. But had we ever known, or did we duly reflect on the horrid barbarity and ignorance, on the wretched gloomy ſuperſtition, from which we are delivered by this light from above, and had we thus been taught to know its infinite value, no cold, no leſſening thoughts of it could find room

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in our breaſts. With eager joy would we embrace the heavenly gift, and with thankful ſouls adore the divine goodneſs manifeſted in beſtowing it. SERM. IV.

WITH a deſign to offer to your conſideration ſome thoughts on this ſubject, I have choſen theſe words of the apoſtle *Paul*, as the foundation of this diſcourſe. Not to ſpend time in ſhowing their connexion with what goes before, it is abundantly plain, that the words, *Giving thanks unto the Father*, in the beginning of the 12th verſe, equally relate to what is contained in the 13th verſe, as to what is immediately ſubjoined to them; which not being ſo much to our preſent purpoſe, we may paſs over, and read the text thus; *Giving thanks unto the Father, who hath delivered us from the power of darkneſs, and hath tranſlated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.*

BY *the power of darkneſs*, I underſtand heatheniſh

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heatheniſh ignorance and ſuperſtition, which is frequently in ſcripture expreſt under this figure, as the goſpel is repreſented by the oppoſite figure of light. Thus, ſays the apoſtle, ſpeaking to the *Gentiles*, *Ye were ſometimes darkneſs, but now ye are light*. The *Gentiles* are ſaid to have *ſat in darkneſs, and in the ſhadow of death*; and God is ſaid to have *called them from darkneſs into his marvellous light:* and this *marvellous light* is the ſame thing that in the text is expreſſed by the *kingdom of the Son of God*; which here, and in many other places of the New Teſtament, denotes the Chriſtian church, or the evangelical diſpenſation, of which Jeſus Chriſt is the author, and in which he muſt be acknowledged as *King* and Lawgiver, by all who ſincerely receive it.

THE propoſition that naturally ariſes from the words thus explained, is this; That God's delivering the *Gentiles* from heatheniſh darkneſs, and calling them to the

the knowledge of the goſpel of Chriſt, is an inſtance of his goodneſs, which ought always to be acknowledged with the higheſt expreſſions of gratitude and praiſe.

IN ordinary caſes, we judge of the meaſure of gratitude due on account of any favour from ſuch circumſtances as theſe; from our deſerving or not deſerving it at the hands of our benefactor; from our great need of it, and our miſery without it; and laſtly, from the importance of the favour itſelf, and the happineſs which we enjoy by means of it. If therefore it can be ſhown, that the *Gentiles* were entirely undeſerving of this valuable gift; that without it they were in a ſtate of very deplorable miſery; and that the poſſeſſion of it is the greateſt happineſs; it will hence be evident, that the goodneſs of God, in beſtowing this gift on them, requires their higheſt gratitude. In this method I propoſe to conſider the ſubject.

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MANKIND are endowed with rational powers, by the due exerciſe of which they may attain to a conſiderable knowledge of God and religion. Altho' men may be placed in ſuch circumſtances, that this knowledge, even when carried to the greateſt height they can bring it to, may ſtill be inſufficient for the great ends of religion; yet undoubtedly a diligent ſearch after it, and a ſuitable improvement of what they have attained, however defective, is the beſt way of recommending them to the favour of God, for what farther knowledge he ſees neceſſary for creatures in their circumſtances. The neglect of this knowledge, on the other hand, and the miſimprovement of their natural powers, render them altogether unworthy of any ſuch favour. Now, that this laſt was the caſe of the heathen nations, is moſt certain. They had ſunk into ſuch an ignorance of the nature of God, and had adopted ſuch an impious, abſurd and ridiculous ſcheme of religion, as it was impoſſible for them

to

to have fallen into, had they exerciſed and improved their reaſon as became rational creatures. Our underſtandings are no doubt very much darkened, and the powers of our mind weakened in this imperfect ſtate; yet not ſo much, but that *from the things that are made*, we may know *the inviſible things of God, even his eternal power and Godhead*; ſo that thoſe ridiculous tribes of mock deities received by the heathens, muſt have been the offspring of the moſt criminal negligence and ſhameful ſtupidity.

SOME, I know, are of opinion, that mankind were in no period of the world left to the glimmerings of their own reaſon, in the inveſtigation of religious knowledge, but were aided by the traditionary remains of the moſt ancient revelations which God made of himſelf to mankind, and which he intended ſhould be handed down from father to ſon. Now, if we take the matter in this view, the guilt of the *Gentiles* will

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will ſtill appear in as ſtrong a light. For to what a ſinful neglect of God, to what a ſcandalous indifference about the great truths of religion, muſt we aſcribe it, that they ſuffered this knowledge of God, conveyed to them by revelation, to be ſo ſoon corrupted, nay, utterly effaced; firſt clouded with fable, and at length quite buried in darkneſs and ſuperſtition? Granting that God did not leave mankind to find out the moſt neceſſary truths, by that ſlow and uncertain way of their own reaſon; yet ſurely theſe noble faculties were deſigned to be of great uſe in religion; to judge what was conſiſtent with infinite perfection, and worthy of God; to guard them from aſcribing to the Deity any thing low or mean, vitious or imperfect. How criminal then was it in men, ſo far to extinguiſh this candle of the Lord, as to make to themſelves gods, whoſe characters would ſute infernal ſpirits, or the vileſt men, better than the objects of religious worſhip and adoration? We can ſcarce read the ſtories

ſtories of the heathen deities, and perſuade ourſelves, that mankind were ever ſo infatuated, as to receive for important articles of faith, what we ſmile at as poetic fables: but ſuch certainly was the caſe, with the multitude at leaſt, even in thoſe nations which looked down on the reſt of the world as barbarous and ignorant: ſo wiſe and diſcerning a creature is man, with all his boaſted powers and extenſive faculties, when left to be his own guide in religion! The great apoſtle of the gentiles gives us a very juſt and elegant deſcription of their ſtate in the firſt chapter of his epiſtle to the *Romans*; *they are without excuſe*, ſays he, *becauſe that when they knew God*, (or might have known God) *they glorified him not as God, but became vain in their imaginations, and their fooliſh hearts were darkened; profeſſing themſelves to be wiſe, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image like to corruptible man, to birds, to fourfooted beaſts and creeping things: they*

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*changed the truth of God into a lie, and worſhipped and ſerved the creature more than the Creator, who is bleſſed for evermore.* Now, as theſe things make it evident, that the gentiles had not improven the light that God had given them, ſo as to deſerve any farther declaration of his will, or had ſo abuſed a firſt revelation, as by no means to deſerve a ſecond; ſo they may ſerve in part to ſhow the miſerable condition into which they had brought themſelves; which was the ſecond thing I propoſed to illuſtrate.

THE miſery of the heathen world may be conſidered in theſe two different views; *firſt*, As flowing from that falſe religion they had adopted:

AND, *ſecondly*, From their ignorance of many neceſſary principles of true religion.

As we are dependent beings, our happineſs or our miſery muſt be very much influenced

fluenced by our notions of that Being, on whom we believe ourſelves to depend. Our conceiving him to be infinite in every perfection, particularly in wiſdom, righteouſneſs and goodneſs, makes our contemplation of him noble and exalted, and the thoughts of our dependence on him pleaſant and delightful. From ſuch thoughts of the Deity flows true religion, which is the ſource of the moſt refined pleaſure; which elevates the ſoul, and raiſes our natures to their greateſt dignity and perfection. On the other hand, our entertaining evil and diſhonourable notions of the Deity, particularly our conceiving of him as grievous and hurtful to mankind; as a Being of fierce paſſions and of cruel revenge, whoſe government is arbitrary and tyrannical; ſuch thoughts, I ſay, muſt fill us with ſlaviſh fear and dread, muſt embitter all our comforts, and make our lives a melancholy ſcene of horror or deſpair. By ſuch thoughts as theſe is begot that monſter ſuperſtition, which harraſſes

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mens minds with chimerical terrors, ſours their tempers, and gives birth to a thouſand paſſions of the worſt and moſt unnatural kind.

Now, that the gentiles had theſe wrong conceptions of the Deity, will appear evidently from the accounts which they themſelves give of their gods, as guilty of the moſt dreadful inſtances of cruelty; from their deifying and paying religious honour and worſhip to things in themſelves the moſt deſtruſtive to mankind; to famine and peſtilence, to fevers, and the moſt dreadful diſeaſes; nay, to evil ſpirits and the powers of hell; from thoſe cruel bloody rites uſed in their worſhip; thoſe dreadful howlings, whippings, maiming their bodies; and above all from their execrable practice of ſhedding human blood in ſacrifice to their gods. For had they not conceived the beings, whom they worſhipped, as ſanguinary and delighting in their miſery, they could never have imagined,

gined, that ſuch rites as theſe would be acceptable to them. Now what peace, what ſatisfaction men could enjoy, who believed themſelves to be under the arbitrary power of ſuch deities as theſe, and conceived themſelves obliged to uſe ſuch deteſtable methods of appeaſing them, may very eaſily be determined.

BUT further, from this there ſprung another branch of miſery; their ſlaviſh dread of their imaginary gods bred in them a mean ſubjection, and implicit obedience to their crafty prieſts. If they would not draw down the vengeance of heaven on their heads, they muſt with reverence ſubmit to that ſacred order, who were too wiſe for themſelves not to improve this folly of the people to their own advantage. The greateſt abſurdities, the moſt palpable falſhoods and contradictions, if they ſerved their intereſted deſigns, were impoſed on the people as divine revelations, which they were not permitted to

examine

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examine nor call in queſtion. Not content with the power of appointing rites and ceremonies, which they multiplied to ſuch a number, that their worſhip became a laborious penance; but thirſting alſo after riches and dominion, they extended their ſubtile craft much farther. Under an artful pretence of knowing, by certain ſigns, future events, and the will of heaven, they eſtabliſhed to themſelves a boundleſs power over the deluded people, who thought themſelves bound on every occaſion to conſult them; and thus every thing, from the moſt important tranſactions in the ſtate, to the meaneſt occurrences in private life, was ſubject to their controul. Now, what baſe ſervitude were they under, and how much muſt they have ſuffered from it, all whoſe actions were thus over-ruled, whoſe greateſt deſigns could thus be broken; whom the word of an ignorant ſoothſayer, or of an intriguing prieſt could inſpire with hope, or ſink into deſpair; whom the entrails of

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ſacrifices, the flight of birds, or things yet more trifling than theſe, could fill with joy, or make pale with fear. What a powerful thing is ſuperſtition! The ancient *Romans*, that wiſe and valiant people, ſo juſtly fam'd for their love of public liberty, were conquered by its force, and ſubmitted to this inglorious ſlavery; even with them was this prieſtcraft carried to the higheſt perfection. What then ſhall we think of the ſtate of thoſe nations, whoſe barbarity and ignorance has occaſioned our having no ſuch particular accounts of them? They ſure, as they lay more open to trick and fraud, and were a more eaſy prey to every ſilly impoſture, muſt have been in circumſtances ſtill more wretched, and muſt have been held in ſtronger chains by *the power of darkneſs*.

BUT the miſery of the heathens will appear in a much ſtronger light, if we conſider their ignorance of the neceſſary principles of true religion. I do not propoſe

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poſe to enter into a detail of the truths, of which the heathens were either wholly ignorant, or of which they had but a dark and imperfect knowledge. I ſhall only make the two following obſervations:

1ſt, OUR happineſs is ſtrictly connected with our paying that honour to God, the Creator and Sovereign of the world, and yielding that obedience to his laws which becomes us as rational creatures, in that ſtation in which we are placed. This connection is founded both on the poſitive appointment of God, and on the nature of man; according to which our happineſs is in various ways connected with the practice of true religion and virtue. Aſſuming this for a principle, it clearly follows, that the knowledge of the Supreme Being whom we are bound to honour, and of that obedience which is due to his laws, muſt be infinitely valuable; and that in proportion as men, through ſloth or negligence, have ſunk into an ignorance

of

of his nature, and of what he requires of them, or have adopted wrong notions of theſe things, in the ſame proportion muſt they be deprived of the neceſſary means of happineſs. Now 'tis evident beyond queſtion, that the gentiles were in a great meaſure ignorant of the nature and perfections of the Deity; that the knowledge of the true God was almoſt entirely loſt, in their invention of numberleſs deities of the vileſt character; that the knowledge of the true worſhip of God was loſt in the irrational, ridiculous, impious ſervice paid to their idols; that a vain pageantry of abſurd rites had uſurp'd the place of true piety, devotion, goodneſs and virtue; that the ſenſe of moral good and evil planted in our natures was thereby much weakened, if not in ſome inſtances quite extinguiſhed; and laſtly, that the knowledge of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, theſe great incitements to religion and virtue, was very dark and imperfect. Now, how far men in theſe circumſtances were capable

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able of paying that rational ſervice to God, which he requires of his intelligent creatures, any one may eaſily judge. This however is certain, that as far as they were incapable of doing it, ſo far were they under an incapacity of attaining to the true happineſs of a rational nature.

To this whole account of the heathen world, and particularly to what has been juſt now ſaid, it may perhaps be objected, that there were ſome amongſt them, who ſaw through the impoſture of the eſtabliſhed religion; who had high and worthy notions of the Supreme Being; of his perfections and his will; and ſuch views of a future ſtate, as were tolerably clear and rational. No doubt there were ſuch; and their attainments, conſidering the diſadvantages they laboured under, were very ſurprizing: but it may be obſerved, once for all, that granting the diſcoveries of theſe philoſophers had been more complete than they appear to have been in reality,

ality, yet as they were very few in number, appearing but ſeldom and in few places of the world; as it was impoſſible for them to propagate their doctrine in any extenſive degree among the people, who abhorr'd them as atheiſts and deſpiſers of their gods; they make ſo ſmall, ſo inconſiderable an exception from the general miſery and ignorance in which the gentiles were involved, as not in this place to merit any particular conſideration.

BUT *ſecondly*, as all mankind have, in innumerable inſtances, tranſgreſſed the laws of God, they muſt be ſenſible, that they are thereby expoſed to his wrath and to juſt puniſhment. Tho' we ſhould ſuppoſe them not to have a full view of their danger in this reſpect, yet we cannot but ſuppoſe, that conſcience muſt on many occaſions have ſuggeſted very alarming apprehenſions and fears, ſufficient to be the cauſes of great uneaſineſs and diſturbance. In this caſe there are certain duties to be performed,

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performed, in order to their obtaining the pardon of their ſins, and being reconciled to God; the diſtinct knowledge of which duties is of the greateſt importance to the peace and comfort of their minds in this world, and without which 'tis impoſſible to have the ſmalleſt rational aſſurance of happineſs hereafter. Now though we ſhould admit, (what can never be yielded) that theſe duties may be known by the light of nature; yet if we conſider the ignorance and corruption the heathens had fallen into, we will ſee no probability that they could ever have attain'd to a diſtinct knowledge, far leſs to a tolerable diſcharge or performance of them. Let us ſuppoſe, that God requires nothing elſe of a ſinner but true repentance and amendment of life; and that man by the due exerciſe of his natural powers, without any extraordinary aſſiſtance, may perform this duty in a right manner. But when could a heathen, who had no juſt notions either of the infinite purity or goodneſs of God;

who

who had never thought of any way of appeaſing the deity, but by ſhedding blood at his altars, by maiming his own body, or by ſome ſuch other uſeleſs rites and obſervances; who was a mere ſtranger to every thing ſpiritual in religion; when, I ſay, could a man in theſe circumſtances perform a duty ſo extenſive and ſpiritual? Never ſure, till his notions of God were corrected, till his ſuperſtition and idolatry were baniſhed out of his mind; till he had got quite new thoughts of the divine love, and of the whole of religion: and how ſoon the gentiles might have done all theſe great things, whilſt they were left to themſelves, will not be eaſily determined: there is great reaſon to believe they would never have done them at all. We ſee that the few great ſpirits amongſt them who employ'd themſelves in the ſearch after truth, after a life ſpent in the moſt laborious ſtudy, with difficulty came to ſee ſome ſmall light through that dark cloud of ignorance, prejudice and ſuperſtition, that

had

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had ſo long blinded their minds: and can we imagine, that the ignorant bigotted croud, could ever have found out, of themſelves, what coſt the greateſt philoſophers ſo much laborious ſtudy and cloſe application? Or were they to leave off their trades, and turn diſciples to the philoſophers, whom they look'd on as profane and impious? Or were their prieſts to turn honeſt, and take ſide with the philoſophers, and confeſs that their religion was all a cheat? Till ſuch impoſſible things as theſe had happen'd, it is not to be conceived how they could have delivered themſelves from that wretched ſuperſtition with which they had been ſo long deluded.

FROM what has been juſt now ſaid, it will appear, that to ſhow the miſery of the heathen world we need not enter into a diſcuſſion of the queſtion, whether the gentiles were left by God under an abſolute incapacity of attaining to his favour, and

and conſequently in a ſtate of damnation. For ſuppoſing God had not left them under any ſuch abſolute incapacity, yet if they had ſunk into ſuch a brutiſh ignorance of the firſt principles of religion, that there was not the leaſt probability of their being able to extricate themſelves; if the teaching and inſtructions of the few more enlighten'd minds that appeared amongſt them, were ſo far from producing any general reformation, that they often proved dangerous to the teachers themſelves; if their political conſtitutions and their idolatrous religion, were ſo woven together, that none could propoſe the leaſt amendment of their religion without being accounted an enemy to the ſtate; if theſe things were ſo, ſurely their caſe muſt have been very deplorable; and not the leſs ſo that they had fallen into it by the neglect of light, and the abuſe of powers ſuppoſed to have been ſufficient for directing them in every part of religion. This circumſtance may make their guilt the greater, but cannot

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cannot poſſibly make their miſery the leſs, and ſo does not neceſſarily enter into the preſent queſtion.

IT is very obvious, that this account of the heathen world, differs extremely from the views given by ſome late authors of the ſtate of mankind without a divine revelation; where they are repreſented as deducing with the greateſt eaſe from the nature of things whatſoever is neceſſary to be known in religion; and from this is drawn as a conſequence, the uſeleſneſs and impertinence of any ſupernatural revelation.

NOT to mention how imperfect their ſchemes are at beſt, and how much they are obliged to the Chriſtian doctrine in framing them; I ſhall only ſubmit to any man's judgment, whether it be moſt rational to judge of the ſtate of mankind, when they were without a revelation, from refined ſpeculations of what ſome perſons think it might have been; or from

from the concurring teſtimony of the hiſtories of all ages, declaring what it actually was, and what at this day it is: and then, whether it be moſt rational to judge of the uſefulneſs and neceſſity of a revelation to the gentile world, from the conſideration of the ſtate they were actually in without it; or from a chimerical ſuppoſed poſſible caſe, which never took place under heaven. The gentlemen may dreſs up what fine ſchemes they pleaſe, but all to no purpoſe. The matter of fact is plain and undeniable; the gentiles were under the power of darkneſs, ignorance and ſuperſtition, which rendered them wretched in the laſt degree. From this ſtate there was ſcarce the leaſt poſſibility of their delivering themſelves. It was therefore a deſign worthy of God, and becoming his infinite wiſdom, goodneſs and mercy, to interpoſe in order to reſcue his creatures from this diſtreſs; by a divine light to diſpel thoſe clouds which no human power could diſſipate; by the

SERM. IV. *day-ſpring from on high* to ſhine into the hearts of thoſe *who ſat in darkneſs and in the ſhadow of death.* Which leads me to the

THIRD thing, from which I propoſed to ſhow the goodneſs of God in this diſpenſation; and that is the great happineſs the gentiles enjoy by the light of the goſpel, and by their being *tranſlated into the kingdom of the Son of God.* That it is neceſſary for the happineſs of mankind in this preſent ſtate, that they ſhould be led by ſome ſuperior hand in religion, ſeems to have been the conſtant opinion even of the heathen world. Hence flow'd their ready ſubmiſſion to every pretence of inſpiration, how abſurd ſoever and deſtitute of proper evidence; hence their regard to their oracles and Sybils; and hence it came, that the deviſers of each particular ſcheme of religion pretended an intercourſe with heaven, and that from thence they derived their inſtitutions and laws. As for the

the philoſophers, on the other hand, who deſpiſed theſe mock revelations, and endeavoured to form a religion for themſelves, how diſtracted and bewilder'd do we often find them in their inquiries? Their reaſon wandered in an endleſs maze, and found no place of reſt. How often, when perplexed with doubts and inſuperable difficulties, do they wiſh and pray for a divine inſtructor? They never thought their reaſon was ſo ſtrong as to render an aſſiſtance from heaven uſeleſs and ſuperfluous. No; that was left to the diſcovery of theſe latter ages! They, like *Elymas*, were ſenſible that a miſt or darkneſs had fallen upon them, and *went about ſeeking one to lead* them *by the hand*. Now this divine light, this heavenly guide, ſo much wanted by mankind, ſo much deſired by the wiſer part of them, is what we enjoy in the revelation of Jeſus Chriſt. We are no more left to grope in the dark, to depend on our own uncertain conjectures, or to be deceived by the inventions of de-

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ſigning men, but have a ſure and a plain rule to lead us in *the way of peace*.

BUT if we conſider the excellency and wonderful perfection of the Chriſtian revelation, we ſhall have ſtill higher thoughts of our happineſs. So much wiſdom and goodneſs appears in every part of it; it is ſo well adapted to the weakneſs and neceſſities of our preſent ſtate; it has ſo obvious a deſign, ſo direct, ſo plain a tendency to promote our happineſs and welfare, that tho' it were not ſtampt with the authority of God, it has innate worth and beauty ſufficient to recommend it to our eſteem and veneration. 'Tis but a very imperfect view of its excellency that can now be given. In the Chriſtian revelation every thing neceſſary for us to know or to do, is laid before us in the cleareſt manner. We have not only a complete ſyſtem of natural religion, but the *hidden wiſdom of God*, the *myſteries kept ſecret ſince the world began* are

are here revealed. Here we are inſtructed in the nature and perfections of the only true and living God. Here he is repreſented to us not only as a being of boundleſs power and majeſty, of perfect purity and holineſs; but of infinite goodneſs and mercy; the Friend and Lover of mankind. Here every ſerious humble mind may without learning or extraordinary parts ſoon diſcover more of God, than the greateſt philoſophers could attain to, by the laborious ſearch of many years. Here all may *know the Lord from the greateſt to the leaſt:* for *the only begotten Son, who is in the boſom of the Father, hath revealed him.* Here we are taught how this world aroſe from nothing at the command of God; we ſee our own origin and the nature of our beings; our bodies formed of the duſt of the earth; our ſouls immortal made after the image of God; the happineſs, the glory of man in his firſt eſtate; his ſad apoſtaſy which ſpoil'd him of all his honour, and caſt him down into miſery and

woe.

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woe. ------ Myſteries that baffled the reaſon and enquiry of antient ſages; their ignorance of which made all their ſchemes deficient and imperfect.

AGAIN, here we have the ſurpriſing method God has appointed for the recovery of man from this wretched ſtate. 'Tis the great deſign of revelation to teach us this important truth, that *through the name of Jeſus Chriſt, whoſoever believeth on him ſhall receive remiſſion of ſins and eternal life.* Now as the heathens could never arrive at the leaſt knowledge of ſalvation through Chriſt; ſo all they had to depend on in this matter, (in which, if in any, it was of the higheſt importance to attain to full certainty) was at the beſt but faint probability and doubtful conjecture.

FURTHER, here we have a complete and diſtinct body of precepts, to regulate our duty to God, our neighbour, and ourſelves. Our duty to God; where nothing

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is required of us, but what is rational, delightful, and perfective of our natures: our duty to our fellow creatures; which is not confined within the bounds of ſtrict juſtice, but extended to a hearty love, friendſhip and beneficence to all men: our duty to ourſelves; which requires nothing but what is neceſſary to the health of our bodies and the ſoundneſs of our minds. Our religion is not burden'd with uſeleſs rites and ceremonies; it is altogether a *reaſonable ſervice*; and the few duties that are not ſo manifeſtly deducible from the nature of things, have ſo plain a tendency to promote purity of mind and a religious diſpoſition, that they are entirely worthy of God, and excellently fitted to the preſent imperfection of our natures. If we conſider the Author of our religion in the light of a mere philoſopher, he is infinitely the greateſt moraliſt that ever appeared on earth. His doctrine is ſo pure, amiable and perfect, and is delivered with ſuch a majeſtic ſimplicity, that it far

excels

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excels the moſt elaborate compoſures of the moſt applauded ancients. Nor is it in this alone that he excels them; for as *he ſpoke as never man ſpoke*, ſo he lived as never man lived: his doctrine is but the picture of his life, which was a bright example, a living pattern of all goodneſs and virtue; by contemplating which we may be better form'd to the ſpirit of true goodneſs, than by the ſtudy of all the wiſeſt human precepts.

FURTHER, to incite our obedience to this perfect rule of righteouſneſs, we have the ſtrongeſt motives and arguments laid before us: arguments drawn from love, reverence, and gratitude to God; from the reaſonableneſs of the duties themſelves; and eſpecially from the future happineſs that is connected with our obedience, and the terrible deſtruction that abides the diſobedient. *Life and immortality are brought to light by the goſpel*; the way of life and the way of death are ſet before us. The beauty

beauty of virtue, and that it is its own reward; the uglineſs, the deformity of vice, and that it is its own puniſhment; theſe topics, ſo much inſiſted on by the philoſophers, afford ſpeculations, which, no doubt, well deſerve the attention of mankind, and on many occaſions may be uſeful, eſpecially to more refined and ingenuous minds: but we may be allowed to ſay, that theſe ſpeculations alone never had, nor will they ever have ſufficient force to conquer our ſtrong bent and inclination to vice, and the innumerable temptations to it with which we are daily ſurrounded.

BUT, *laſtly*, the Chriſtian revelation not only gives us the completeſt ſyſtem of precepts, and enforces them by the ſtrongeſt motives; but likeways points out a ſuperior aſſiſtance, by the help of which we may be enabled to give obedience to them. Without this, of how little effect was all the teaching of the philoſophers, and their

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their eloquent harangues in praiſe of goodneſs! The moſt cogent reaſoning, the ſublimeſt eloquence are too often found ineffectual for inſpiring us with ſuch a love of virtue, as ſhall conquer the paſſions, and ſubdue the natural corruptions of our hearts. A more powerful method of perſuaſion is requiſite for ſuch an end, even his inſpiration who is the *God of the ſpirits of all fleſh*; who *form'd the ſoul of man within him*; and who by a thouſand ſecret ways can convey the truth to our hearts in its full energy and power; can illuminate what is dark, purify what is corrupted, and rectify what is perverſe within us.

THIS is an imperfect view of ſome of the chief excellencies of the Chriſtian religion, and of the happineſs we enjoy by being *tranſlated into the kingdom of the Son of God*. If it is a bleſſing to be delivered from darkneſs, ignorance and ſuperſtition, and to be enlightened with the moſt divine

vine and uſeful knowledge; if it is a bleſſing to know what God is, and what we are ourſelves; if it is a bleſſing to a rational creature to be taught the juſt rule of rational conduct, to a ſinful creature to be taught how to make his peace with God; if it is a bleſſing to have our views and our purſuits rightly directed to the greateſt poſſible happineſs here, and to a crown of immortal glory hereafter---- then, with higheſt gratitude, we have reaſon to *give thanks to the Father*, who hath beſtowed upon us the light of the Goſpel.

THE Goſpel, I ſay, when clearly and fully revealed, and when diſpenſed in its purity and ſimplicity, is the ſource of ſuch bleſſings: for I am aware of what may be objected to this account of our happineſs under the Goſpel, in oppoſition to our miſery under pagan darkneſs. Theſe things, it may be ſaid, do very well in ſpeculation; but has the Goſpel actually produced

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theſe bleſſed effects? has it reſcued mankind from ſuperſtition and ignorance? does not a great part of the Chriſtian world labour under theſe diſeaſes in an equal degree almoſt with the heathen world? where then is the mighty advantage of the Chriſtian revelation? I wiſh we could anſwer the objection, by denying the fact on which it is founded; but alas! 'tis too evident and certain to be altogether refuſed. The following conſiderations will, however, in ſome meaſure take off the force of the objection.

*Firſt*, No ſuch thing as perfection is to be expected in this world, under any religion whatſoever. The wickedneſs and craft of ſome men, joined with the weakneſs and folly of others, will always be able, in ſome meaſure, to prevent the good effects of the moſt perfect inſtitution mankind can poſſibly enjoy.

*Secondly*,

*Secondly*, As it is certain, that, by the Chriſtian religion, we are better guarded againſt thoſe miſchievous conſequences of the degeneracy of mankind, than if we had no ſuch guide in religion; ſo it muſt be owned, that however corrupt ſome Chriſtians may be, yet wherever the Chriſtian religion has been eſtabliſhed, it has produced a change to the better.

*Thirdly*, IT is certain, that this change has been greater or leſs, in proportion as the goſpel has been more or leſs clearly and fully publiſhed and eſtabliſhed; free from ſuperſtitious mixtures and doctrines of human invention; and that wherever the goſpel has prevailed in its native purity, it has always gained a glorious victory over the powers of darkneſs.

*Laſtly*, As all I have been endeavouring to prove is, that we ought to be thankful to God for the light of the goſpel; the objection may be anſwered, by obſerving, that

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that altho', by reaſon of the wickedneſs and folly of men, this valuable gift has been in too many inſtances miſ-improven, yet this does not at all derogate from the value of the gift itſelf; nor ought it to make thoſe leſs thankful for it, who, if they be not entirely blind, muſt ſee its infinite worth, and be ſenſible of its bleſſed tendency: and this leads me to conclude with this one reflexion.

IF the knowledge of the Goſpel is ſo great a privilege and bleſſing, how thankful ought we to be to our gracious God, who has viſited us with this ſalvation, and made the *Sun of righteouſneſs* to ſhine on this diſtant corner of the earth. I formerly obſerved, that the miſerable ſtate of darkneſs into which the gentile nations had ſunk, made the goodneſs of God very remarkable in beſtowing this bleſſing upon them. If we apply this conſideration to ourſelves in particular, none can have better reaſon to adore the goodneſs

goodneſs of God than we. No nation perhaps in the world was overwhelmed with more melancholy darkneſs, with greater ignorance and ſuperſtition, than this iſland which we inhabit, before God viſited us with his *marvelous light*. Our forefathers, if we may credit the accounts given of them, were wild and ſavage to a proverb; the principles of natural religion and morality were almoſt extinguiſhed amongſt them; their religion was a mad ſuperſtition. The Goſpel has diſpelled this darkneſs, reformed this barbarity, and in a great meaſure civilized one of the wildeſt nations under heaven. SERM. IV.

CAN it therefore be thought upon, without an equal ſurprize and deteſtation, that there ſhould be any among us, who are ready impiouſly to throw back this valuable gift of God on his face; who deſpiſe and reject it as uſeleſs and ſuperfluous, on the impudent pretence, that their natural know-

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knowledge of religion was fully ſufficient for their inſtruction and happineſs? Had theſe men lived in this iſland two thouſand years ago, or were they living juſt now in any of thoſe countries that have never yet been viſited by the goſpel, 'tis more than probable their ſchemes of natural religion would not have been altogether ſo complete; and whatever refined ſentiments in religion they may now pretend to, 'tis very likely they had been as deeply engaged in the ſuperſtition of their country, as any of their neighbours.----- Let us then, my brethren, ever be thankful to our merciful Father, that we who were *alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that was in us,* have now received the knowledge of the truth; that we no more *walk in darkneſs, but have the light of life.* And let us expreſs our gratitude, by preſerving a due regard and eſteem for this divine revelation, and eſpecially by *bringing forth fruits meet for the goſpel.* This is the great, the only ſure evidence

evidence of our having received the Gospel in sincerity. *By this shall all men know*, saith our Lord, *that ye are my disciples, if ye keep my commandments. Let us not therefore henceforth walk as the other gentiles walk, in the vanity of their minds; but walk worthy of the Lord, to all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.* SERM. IV.

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# SERMON V.

## The Reaſonableneſs and the Advantages of EARLY PIETY.

ECCLESIASTES xii. 1.

*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou ſhalt ſay, I have no pleaſure in them.*

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THE main deſign of the royal preacher, in this excellent book, is to give an anſwer to that important queſtion, Wherein conſiſts the chief good and higheſt felicity of man? a queſtion, which employed the thought and ſtudy of the philoſophers of old; in anſwering which, they divided into ſuch a multitude of opinions, and ſo contradictory to one another, as affords us a convincing proof, how fallible, how uncertain a guide unaſſiſted

assisted reason is to lead us in the way to happiness. But our divine philosopher, who had wisdom and understanding given him from above, and enjoyed that light which the wisest of the heathen sages wished and prayed for, leaves us not thus to grope in the dark, and to wander in a maze of different opinions, exposed to such danger of catching at shadows instead of the substance. In the first part of his discourse, he inquires into those enjoyments which the bulk of mankind pursue as their chief good; the pleasures of sense, of riches, of honour and power. In his examination of which likeways, he has a signal advantage over the ancient moralists. They, in the obscure retirement of their schools, declaim against pleasures they had never tasted. *Solomon*, a glorious and a powerful monarch, possessed at the same time of the noblest genius and the greatest treasures, having, in the bloom of his years, made the fullest experiment, determines, that as these enjoyments are not only vain,

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fleeting and uncertain, but the ſource of vexation and ſorrow to the children of men, the chief good and higheſt felicity of man cannot lye in the poſſeſſion of any, or all of theſe: but, on the other hand, as religion and virtue alone can yield us that true ſatisfaction and pleaſure which reaches to the ſoul, outlives this tranſitory life, and extends through the whole of our exiſtence, he juſtly draws the concluſion, that to *fear God and keep his commandments is the whole duty of man*; his chief good; that which alone deſerves his care and diligence. As the eſtabliſhing of this truth ſeems to be the principal deſign which the inſpired writer has in view through the whole of this work; ſo we find, that his reaſonings for proving it are frequently interrupted by beautiful digreſſions, and exhortations ſuitable to the ſeveral heads of diſcourſe. Of this laſt kind are the words of the text, which ſeem to be occaſioned by what we find in the 7th and 8th verſes of the preceeding chapter.

chapter. The wiſe man there concludes his proof of the inſufficiency of the things of the world to make us truly happy, by obſerving the vaſt diſproportion there is between the preſent life, and that which is to come. *Truly light is ſweet, and a pleaſant thing it is to behold the ſun. But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkneſs, for they ſhall be many. Rejoice O young man in thy youth, and let thy heart chear thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the ſight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all theſe things God will bring thee into judgment: therefore remove anger from thy heart, and put away evil from thy fleſh, for childhood and youth are vanity:* which naturally introduces the exhortation in the text, *Remember now thy Creator*, &c. SERM. V.

By the remembrance of God may be underſtood, the particular duty of ever retaining in our minds ſuch becoming thoughts

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thoughts of the Supreme Being, and his glorious perfections; and ſuch a lively ſenſe of the obligations we are under to him, as will have an habitual influence on the whole of our converſation. But I chuſe rather to underſtand it in a more general ſenſe, as ſuch phraſes are often uſed in ſcripture, to ſignify the whole of religion and virtue; *Remember now thy Creator.* This particular character of the Deity, includes in it a variety of arguments for the duty here required.------*Remember* him to whom thou oweſt thy life, thy breath, and all things; who ſpoke thee into being by the word of his power; who has preſerved thee by his goodneſs and mercy; who has the beſt, the moſt undoubted right to thy ſervice; to whoſe glory thou art bound, by the ſtricteſt ties of gratitude, to dedicate thy life, thy health, thy underſtanding, thine eſtate, and every bleſſing he has beſtowed upon thee. Him we are exhorted to remember *now in the days of our youth*; to remember him in the firſt,

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the beſt part of our lives; while we are in our ſtrength and vigour; when the powers both of body and mind are moſt active and lively; *before the evil days come*, &c. before we are overtaken with diſtreſs or ſickneſs, or thoſe calamities of old age ſo pathetically deſcribed in the verſes following the text. SERM. V.

WHAT I propoſe in diſcourſing from the words at preſent, is,

I. BRIEFLY to repreſent to you the reaſonableneſs of the duty here enjoined, and the obligations we are under to the performance of it. And then,

II. To ſhow ſome of the bleſſings and advantages that attend it.

I. IT is our duty then to *remember God our Creator in the days of our youth*; to dedicate our early years to the ſervice of God, and to the practice of religion and virtue; for,

1*ſt*, GOD

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*1ſt*, GOD has a right to the ſervice of our whole lives; a right built on the ſureſt, the moſt immovable foundation. We are his creatures, the workmanſhip of his hands; *in him we live, we move*, and from *him we have our being*; and thus we are his property, entirely at the diſpoſal of his ſovereign will, and abſolutely ſubject to his ſupreme dominion. He is the *preſerver of men*; whoſe upholding arm being withdrawn, we would inſtantly return to the duſt; who gives us *meat to eat, and raiment to put on*; from whom we have all the bleſſings that make our lives agreeable and eaſy. And while he thus upholds and maintains our exiſtence, has he not an undoubted right to our obedience? while he beſtows ſo many bleſſings upon us, has he not, as our Supreme Benefactor, a title to the ſervice of our whole lives, and of all our faculties? Again, he is the merciful Redeemer of mankind, and thus has laid us under new obligations to ſerve and obey him. We had loſt and *deſtroyed ourſelves*:

*ſelves:* he in mercy ſought after us and ſaved us. We had ſold ourſelves unto ſlavery: he ranſomed us, and with a price of infinite value purchaſed our liberty and freedom. We were under the ſentence of death, and the ſword of divine juſtice was hanging over our guilty heads: he gave his eternal Son, *the brightneſs of his glory*, to ſuffer for our ſins, and to taſte of death for the children of men. Should we not therefore *glorify God in our bodies and ſpirits which are his?* and are we not bound, who live by him, henceforth *not to live unto ourſelves, but unto him that died for us and roſe again?* Has God a right to our ſervice, on ſo many and ſo weighty accounts, and ſhall we be ſo unjuſt, as to deny him what is his own; or think the ſervice of our lives too great in return for ſo many bleſſings and favours?---Do we at any time live independent of God? Are we at any time preſerved by our own wiſdom and power? Was this the caſe we might have ſome pretence to ſpend our own time, after our own pleaſure;

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pleaſure: but as his powerful and bountiful hand is the ſupport of our beings, and the ſource of our mercies through the whole of our exiſtence, if he thereby acquires a right to any part, he acquires for the ſame reaſon a right to the whole. What is our time and the prolonging of our days? is it not the gift of God? Why *died we not from the womb*, or have not long e're now gone down again unto ſilence? is it not God, who hath *held our ſouls in life, preſerved us in our going out, and our coming in*, and graciouſly lengthened out our time and the number of our years? And are we not bound then to redeem thoſe years for his ſervice, and to employ them to the honour of the giver?

2*dly*, As God has a right to our whole lives, ſo he has a peculiar right to the ſervice of our youth. Youth is the prime of our lives, the flower of our days. Then the body enjoys its beauty and ſtrength; the mind its activity and vigour; the fancy its

its ſprightlineſs and life. This therefore is the beſt of our time; what is deareſt to ourſelves; yielding us the higheſt ſatisfaction and joy; and upon theſe very accounts God has a peculiar right and title to it. Were the firſt born of man and of beaſt, and the firſt fruits of the field to be offered unto God? and has he not a right as undeniable to the firſt fruits of our lives, the firſt born of our days, the firſt exerciſe of our reaſon, and the prime of our affections? Now it is that the generous paſſions have all their ardour and warmth; and has not God, whoſe unbounded goodneſs, whoſe amiable excellence alone is worthy of our love; has not he, I ſay, a ſpecial right to it then, when it enjoys its ſtrength and vigour, and burns with the ſtrongeſt flame? Shall we proſtitute the noble warmth of our affections on the ignoble pleaſures of ſenſe and the fading beauties here below; and reſerve their languid breathings in old age or ſickneſs for him who is the perfection

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tion of beauty, the fountain of excellence? Now it is that we have the neareſt, the livelieſt views of the divine goodneſs. Our life and being are gifts but newly conferred. Our preſervation during a helpleſs infancy and a feeble childhood is now freſh upon our minds, and calls upon us to remember him who ſupported us, when we hung upon our mothers breaſts. Our life is now in its verdure and flower. Now for the moſt part we are free from thoſe calamities and miſchiefs that embitter our more advanced years. Without diſeaſes or pains, free from oppreſſing cares and anxious ſolicitude, we paſs our days in pleaſure, mirth and eaſe; and while thus we taſte of the goodneſs of our God, has he not the higheſt right to the grateful return of our love? And can there be any thing more perfidious and baſe, than to ſquander away in the ſervice of ſin that period of life in which God, by ſo many bleſſings, would engage us to himſelf? Afterwards, perhaps, long poſſeſſion will make

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us ready to look upon our lives as our own, and tempt us to forget the God that made us. But now, when looking but a little back, we ſee the time in which we began to be, or firſt were conſcious of our being; ought we not with gratitude and love to reflect on him, who is the author of our being, and has preſerved us from the womb? Afterwards the troubles of life may render us leſs ſenſible of the divine goodneſs, and eclipſe its beams; but ought we not to dedicate thoſe days of joy and gladneſs to his honour, whoſe ſun then ſhines unclouded on our heads, and whoſe love ſhowers down ſo many comforts around us? What then can be more manifeſt, more undeniable, than that during this period the Divine Being has a peculiar right to our ſervice?---But then,

3*dly*, As God has a right to our whole lives, and a peculiar title to our youth; ſo the work he has given us to do in this world, and the ſervice he requires of us, are

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are things for which the whole of our life is no more than ſufficient. What is our life? *it is even as a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vaniſheth away. Man that is born of a woman is of few days; his years are as a handbreadth,* and *ſwifter than a poſt.* And of this narrow fleeting ſpace, how little deſerves the name of life, or can be employed for its important ends? How many are the days of thoughtleſs infancy and childhood; and may not the ſucceſſive returns of ſleep and waking be ſaid to divide our more advanced years unto life and non-exiſtence? Is then this ſmall compaſs of life more than ſufficient for acquiring the knowledge of God; for contemplating his perfections and his works; for planting in our ſouls every grace and virtue; for forming our natures corrupt, and degenerate, into a reſemblance with God; in ſhort for preparing ourſelves, by a courſe of holineſs and virtue, for the ſtate of perfection and happineſs above? Theſe are exer-

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ciſes we have naturally no great fondneſs for; and time, induſtry and perſeverance are neceſſary to ſurmount the difficulties which occur in them. True indeed it is, our holy religion leaves us not to encounter theſe difficulties alone, but points out a ſuperior aid, which can *perfect ſtrength in our weakneſs*, and make us *more than conquerors*: yet after all, the Chriſtian life is a race, where, as the ſlipperineſs of the path requires the greateſt attention leſt we fall, and the allurements we are ſurrounded with require vigour and reſolution leſt we be tempted to turn aſide; ſo the length of the courſe, and the ſhortneſs of our day, require, that we ſhould ſet out betimes leſt the night of everlaſting darkneſs overtake us. Have we then ſo dangerous a warfare to accompliſh; enemies ſo powerful to encounter; ſo difficult a conqueſt to obtain; and ought we not to be early in the field? to occupy the places of ſtrength, the advantageous poſts, before they are poſſeſſed by

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by the enemy; and by giving him battle before he has rallied all his force, to endeavour to ſecure the more complete and eaſy victory? Having thus briefly repreſented the reaſonableneſs of this duty, from theſe ſeveral conſiderations,

I PROCEED to the *ſecond* thing propoſed from the words; which was, To ſhow the bleſſings and happy conſequences of *remembering our Creator in the days of our youth*; or the advantages of early piety.

*1ſt*, THIS will render the religious life natural and pleaſant to us. It is an ordinary obſervation, that cuſtom makes every thing eaſy, and becomes as it were a ſecond nature. The things which at firſt ſeem extremely difficult, and next to impoſſible, after ſome practice we come to perform with the greateſt facility: ſo likeways a manner of life, which at firſt ſeemed ſlaviſh and burdenſome, will by degrees appear

appear more tolerable, and at length perhaps become ſo agreeable, that it is with regret and uneaſineſs we think of a change. But how much more will this be the caſe in the practice of religion, which is the only ſource of real pleaſure, yielding a ſatisfaction which the delights of the world can never equal? It is not with religion, as it is with the pleaſures of ſin, which the more we taſte of, the more we muſt neceſſarily deſpiſe; though our unreaſonable paſſions continue to puſh us on to ſeek for pleaſure where we have already found that all is vanity. Religion requires only to be known in order to be loved; and the more we know and are acquainted with it, we will love it the more. It is owing to our minds being vitiated by the falſe pleaſures of ſin, that we are inſenſible of the pleaſures of religion, or ever look upon it as comfortleſs or irkſome. But if by an early application to it, we prevented our taſte from being corrupted, and our affections from being per-

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verted, we would run in the ways of righteouſneſs with pleaſure: every day would diſcover to us new enjoyments in religion, new beauties in virtue, and it would be *as our meat and drink to do the will of God our heavenly father.*

2*dly*, ANOTHER advantage of early piety is, that thereby we ſhall eſcape all the dangers of youth. How many, how fatal are the miſchiefs to which our youth is expoſed, if it be not reſtrained and governed by religion and virtue? Our paſſions are then at the higheſt; our taſte for pleaſure keeneſt; our judgment is but weak, and our foreſight ſmall. In that period of life we have not a ſufficient meaſure of experience, to enable us to diſcover the bad conſequences of the purſuits in which we engage; or if we diſcover them, yet ſuch is the violence of our appetites, and our furious raſhneſs, that we are too apt to deſpiſe the danger, and frequently plunge ourſelves into the moſt irretrievable diſtreſs.

We

We need only on this head conſult our own experience and obſervation, in whatever ſtation of life we have been placed, and we ſhall find too many and too mournful inſtances of the diſaſters of vicious youth. It is indeed the higher ſphere of life which affords examples of this kind the moſt remarkable and melancholy.----The poor thoughtleſs youth ſets out into the world juſt poſſeſſed of an opulent fortune, the ſpring of his preſent joy and his after ruin. He reſolves to give himſelf full ſwing in all the extravagancies of life. He looks on his eſtate as given him for this very purpoſe; and, however it may be with meaner mortals, pleaſure he imagines to be his only buſineſs. Accordingly he embarks in the laudable deſign: foppery in dreſs, and a gaudy equipage, the uſual firſt fruits of youthful folly, run him of courſe into a vaſt expence. The more hurtful paſſions come in to increaſe the charge; by which, if he is not ſunk into poverty and indigence, yet what a train of dangers has

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he to encounter? One vice expoſes to the vileſt diſeaſes; another to the commiſſion of the moſt dreadful crimes: all combine to ruin his character, to ſhatter his judgment, to break his conſtitution, and to bring on the crazineſs of old age, even in the bloom of his years. So that after a ſhort courſe of this fatal extravagance, he is left to languiſh out the wretched remainder of his time in pain and deep remorſe. Nay, how oft may we ſee the unhappy youth cut ſhort in the midſt of his mad career? A raging fever, the fruit of an irregular life, puts an end to his days: or his blood being inflamed by intemperance, he is led into quarrels which end in murder or death: theſe, theſe, are the conſequences of a licentious youth. But, would we ſecure ourſelves againſt thoſe horrid miſchiefs, and ſafely paſs thoſe rocks and quick-ſands, we muſt arm ourſelves betimes with the love of God and virtue. A youth may fondly flatter himſelf that his good ſenſe and judgment will guard

guard him ſufficiently from follies ſuch as theſe, no leſs inconſiſtent with reaſon than oppoſite to religion. But alas! *the heart of man is deceitful above all things, and deſperately wicked; who can know it?* Little is he, who flatters himſelf thus, acquainted with the power of temptation, and the contagious influence of bad examples; how they inſinuate themſelves into our minds, baffle the ſtrongeſt reſolutions, and baniſh every ſober thought. Who would vainly truſt to his own wiſdom and conduct, in a way ſo full of ſnares and dangers? It is religion alone, the fear and the love of God, and that gracious protection which he vouchſafes to his children, that can arm us ſufficiently againſt thoſe powerful enemies, and guard and preſerve us from the dangers of youth. And not only ſo, but further in the

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3*d* PLACE, it will alſo furniſh us with conſolation under all the calamities of life, and with ſupport under death itſelf.

Strangely

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Strangely ignorant and fooliſh muſt he be, who fondly hopes to paſs thro' this valley of tears without vexation and trouble. *Man is born unto trouble as the ſparks fly upwards*; and no ſtate, nor period of life affords us any exemption from this common fate of all the children of men. We are expoſed to innumerable diſeaſes that may render our lives a ſcene of miſery and woe; all our enjoyments are extremely precarious; by a thouſand various ways we may be deprived of them; our riches may take wings unto themſelves and fly away; death may ſnatch from us thoſe friends whom we loved as our own ſoul, and leave us ſorrowful and alone, to mourn over their loſs with whom we would have wiſhed to die. How often do ſuch misfortunes blaſt the faireſt proſpects we had formed in our youth? how often do they throw a black cloud over all our remaining days, and utterly oppreſs and overwhelm the minds of thoſe who are unſupported by any higher principles or hopes? Is it not wiſe then to prepare our-

ourſelves for approaching affliction and trouble, and to provide the beſt defence we can againſt it? But where is this preparation and defence to be found, unleſs in an early application to piety and virtue; by which we may ſecure to ourſelves divine friendſhip in the midſt of all the various and unforeſeen events of human life? *Happy is the man whoſe hope is in the Lord his God, who made the heaven and the earth. The Lord is his light and his ſalvation, whom ſhall he fear? The Lord is the ſtrength of his life, of whom ſhall he be afraid? The Lord is his ſtrong habitation, whereunto he ſhall reſort; his rock,* and *his dwelling-place thro' all generations.* If in the bloom of life we have dedicated ourſelves to God; if in the midſt of its gayeſt and brighteſt ſcenes we have remembred and honoured our Creator; then in its darkeſt hours we may look up to him with confidence and hope, and reſt in his protection, as our ancient friend. When all other ſources of comfort are dried up, this will open

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open to us a perennial ſpring in religion, which ſhall ever continue to flow. *To the upright there ſhall ariſe light in darkneſs. The peace of God ſhall keep their minds. A joy* ſhall be theirs, *which a ſtranger intermeddleth not with.*

BUT the bleſſed influence of religion appears moſt conſpicuouſly at the hour of death. The empire of death extends over all the ages and conditions of men; and the growing vigour, the blooming beauty of youth, are not beyond the reach of his all-conquering arm. Now, is there any thing but religion that can bear up our ſouls, when attacked by this dreadful foe? Then riches and honours, the world and its deceitful pleaſures ſhall retire, and leave their deluded votaries trembling and naked, wretched and forlorn. But happy, thrice happy, at that critical period, is he, who from his early youth has made religion his choice; who can review with pleaſure the paſt ſcenes of a virtuous life; who

who with humble confidence can commit his ſoul to that God whom he has long ſerved and loved. He can look on death without diſmay; and, ſeeing through its dark vale the dawning of immortal bliſs, can welcome its approaches with calmneſs and ſerenity of mind.

THUS early religion has a bleſſed influence to ſupport us under all the calamities of life, and at the hour of death itſelf; and to this may we not add, that it will alſo exalt us to a greater degree of glory in heaven? The moſt ſublime notion that either reaſon or revelation afford us of the celeſtial ſtate, is, that it will conſiſt in the perfection of virtue, in our being made like to God. In order to our arriving at this, the ſeeds of virtue muſt be ſown here; the tender plant muſt be carefully nouriſhed; but the ſooner it is ſown, the longer it is nouriſhed, may not we juſtly expect, that it ſhall riſe to a greater height, and being tranſplanted more tall and flouriſhing

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ing to the regions above, ſhall there be honoured with a place proportioned to its growth and ſtature.

THUS have I endeavoured briefly to enforce the duty of remembering our Creator in the days of our youth, and have repreſented the chief advantages of our doing ſo; a ſubject, which tho' it more immediately reſpects thoſe of a certain age, yet none of more advanced years have reaſon to think themſelves entirely unconcerned in it. If they have ſpent their youth in folly; if now the hurry of worldly cares diſtracts and fills their minds; if they have trifled or dreamed away too many of their years; with what redoubled force muſt the exhortation reach them, *now to remember their Creator, before the evil days yet come, and the years draw nigh, in which they ſhall ſay, they have no pleaſure in them.* But I hope, I ſhall be allowed to conclude this diſcourſe, in an addreſs to thoſe whom the text has particularly in view.

IF

IF you conſult your own breaſts, my brethren, you will find, that the deſire of pleaſure is the ruling paſſion. We call you not to deny this darling appetite: no, it is the wiſe conſtitution of God, eſſential to your natures, and neceſſary to their perfection. But would you have this paſſion fully ſatisfied? or would you ſearch for ever, and meet with nothing but pain and diſappointment? By dedicating your early years to religion and virtue, you ſhall reap the trueſt, the moſt laſting delight and joy. Alas! how vain and chimerical are the hopes of pleaſure you build on the enjoyments of the world? Are you placed in a ſuperior ſtation in life? How early do you begin to lay down ſchemes of future happineſs and grandeur; your intoxicated imaginations are employed in painting out ſcenes of pleaſure, and every revolution in life affords you a proſpect more joyful and gay than another. But, if you look for pleaſure in the ways of ſin, you miſerably deceive yourſelves. There you will

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will find nothing but what is empty and vain, falſe and dangerous. Theſe pleaſures may be ſweet to your taſte, but they turn to gall and bitterneſs within. At a diſtance they may appear beauteous and comely, but you will find them, on a nearer view, full of deformity and uglineſs. You may come to them full fraught with hopes of ſolid ſatisfaction, but the enjoyment is vaniſhing, and leaves nothing behind it but ſhame and remorſe. Even the more innocent enjoyments of life, you behold at preſent through a deceitful glaſs. At the higheſt they are but faint and languid, fleeting and tranſitory. Your joy ſhall be chequered with ſorrow, your pleaſure mingled with grief, and the ſum of all ſhall ſtill be *vanity and vexation of ſpirit.* But would you paſs your days in pleaſure? Seek it in the paths of virtue, where you ſhall find a delight that reaches to the ſoul, which is laſting and uniform; which is manly and noble; which alone can ſupport you under every circumſtance of life.

Do you look upon religion as joyleſs, ſorrowful and melancholy? Were this the caſe, it might indeed be hard to perſuade thoſe, in whom the fire of youth yet burns, to embrace and entertain it. But this is a ſlander on religion; religion exhilerates the ſoul with the pureſt joy, and gives the ſweeteſt reliſh to all the other comforts of life. The moment we exceed the bounds it preſcribes us, the pleaſure is turned unto pain, the comfort unto ſorrow, the bleſſing unto a curſe. *The ways of wiſdom are the ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her paths are peace.*

AGAIN, my brethren, do you find in your breaſts a paſſion for praiſe? are you ambitious of applauſe and honour? This too is a laudable paſſion, and it finds its moſt proper exerciſe in the purſuit of religion. For religion and virtue add a luſtre and grace, a ſuperior amiableneſs to every accompliſhment either of body or mind. What an alluring thing is a ſprightly wit, when

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when joined with innocence and goodneſs? how charming is beauty when accompanied with virtue? The beauty of the face we admire as a natural image of the beauty of the mind; but, if we find the picture is falſe, and that the fair outſide covers a mind ſtained and deformed with vice, it loſes all it charms. How engaging, how endearing a thing is early piety and virtue? It renders you the beloved of God, the favourites of heaven; it ſecures you the eſteem and honour of the beſt and wiſeſt of men, and commands an inward regard and reverence even from the abandoned and the vicious. The youth who has ſubjected his mind to the dictates of reaſon; who glorioufly ſpurns the baſe and unmanly allurements of vice; who has choſen the ſteep path of virtue, and is daily making advances in that arduous aſcent to true glory, is an object more worthy of admiration and praiſe, than an *Alexander* or a *Cæſar*, adorned with the laurels of conquered nations.

HAVE you then a taſte for true pleaſure? are you ambitious of honour, or of praiſe? would you ſet off theſe endowments that adorn your youth in the beſt and faireſt light? *Seek wiſdom, watching daily at her gates, waiting at the poſts of her doors: for riches and honour are with her; her fruit is better than gold, yea, than much fine gold; and happy is the man that findeth her.* Make the *teſtimonies of God thy delight, and thy counſellors*; thereby ſhalt thou *cleanſe thy way, takin heed thereto according to his word. When ſinners entice thee, conſent thou not, walk not thou in the way with them, refrain thy foot from their path; keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the iſſues of life; put away from thee a froward mouth and perverſe lips. Preſent your bodies a living ſacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your reaſonable ſervice*; and, *denying ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, live ſoberly, righteouſly and godly, looking for the bleſſed hope, and glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt*;

SERM. V. *Chriſt:* To whom with the Father, and the bleſſed Spirit, be glory, dominion and praiſe for evermore. Amen.

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# SERMON VI.

## The Folly and Danger of delaying to enter upon a RELIGIOUS LIFE.

ECCLESIASTES xii. 1.

*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou ſhalt ſay, I have no pleaſure in them.*

HAVING, on a former occaſion, diſcourſed from theſe words, of the duty of dedicating our early years to the ſervice of God and religion; and having repreſented the advantages and bleſſings that attend our doing ſo, I now propoſe to lay before you the extreme folly and danger of delaying this important work; and eſpecially of delaying it until *the evil days come*, and *the years draw nigh, when*

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*we ſhall ſay we have no pleaſure in them.* In order to which, we may conſider the following things:

I. THE great uncertainty of human life makes it impoſſible for us to know, if afterwards we ſhall have time for this important work.

II. WERE we ſure of afterwards having time, yet by thus delaying we become more averſe to the work, and the work itſelf becomes more hard and difficult.

III. SUPPOSING that this were not the caſe, and that this delay produced no change to the worſe, in either of theſe reſpects; yet the ſeaſons of old age or ſickneſs, to which we delay, are in themſelves improper for the management of a buſineſs ſo weighty and great.

IV. WERE there nothing in the days of ſickneſs or old age that render'd them unfit

fit for commencing our application to religion; yet, by ſpending our ſtrength and vigour in the ſervice of ſin, and allotting only theſe worſt of our days to the ſervice of God, we become unworthy of his favour, and may juſtly provoke him to deny us that grace which we have ſo often deſpiſed and rejected: after having ſpoken briefly to which, I ſhall end with ſome reflections on the ſubject.

I. THE great uncertainty of human life makes it impoſſible for us to know, if afterwards we ſhall have time for the important work of repenting and reforming our lives. How vain and fooliſh is the conduct of youth! they expect to live to old age and grey hairs; and then, when they ſuppoſe their paſſions ſhall have loſt their force, and their taſte for the pleaſures of ſin ſhall be abated, they reſolve to mind the concerns of their ſouls, and dedicate to religion that ſeaſon which they think good for nothing elſe. But tho' the young

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and the gay will ſcarce allow a thought ſo gloomy to diſcompoſe their minds, and reckon it by much too ſoon to think that they muſt die; yet certain it is, that the empire of death extends over all ages and conditions of men; and neither youth, nor ſtrength nor beauty, afford us the leaſt ſecurity for the continuance of life. *All the glory of man is as the graſs, and his goodneſs as the flower of the field; as the graſs it withereth, and as the flower of the field it paſſeth away.* The young man in the prime of his years, in the vain thoughtleſs time of his life, when he indulges himſelf without controul in whatever he deſires, and *witholds not his heart from any joy*, in the midſt of this mad career may be ſuddenly ſtopt by death, and torn for ever from his beloved pleaſures. Is there any of us ſo young, who has not mourned for the death of friends as young or younger than ourſelves? Whom are we daily attending to the grave? are they only thoſe, whoſe hoary heads made them ripe for death?

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are they not for the moſt ſuch who have been cut off in the firſt ſpring of life, or what they reckoned but the middle of their days? Ask any man who has arrived at ſixty or ſeventy years, who were his friends and companions, with whom he paſſed the joyful years of youth? How many will he number who have gone to the duſt and have ſeen corruption? but how few, who yet ſurvive and are the companions of his old age? The half of mankind, born into the world, die in the years of infancy and childhood; and of thoſe that arrive at the uſe of reaſon, ſcarce a fourth part come near to that period to which God has now reſtricted the life of man. Can any thing then be more irrational, than to deceive ourſelves with thoſe vain, thoſe flattering hopes? or more abſurd, than in a buſineſs of infinite concern to us, to depend on events ſo uncertain and precarious? Now, perhaps, we glory in our ſtrength and vigour, and, rejoicing in fulneſs of health, we think our lives

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ſecure for a courſe of years to come; yet, alas! there may be but a ſtep between us and death. *Man knoweth not his time, but as the fiſhes that are caught in the evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the ſnare, ſo are the ſons of men ſnared in an evil time, when it falleth ſuddenly upon them* *. Does death always come on by ſlow and gradual ſteps, and give us timeous warning of his approach? on the contrary, how many ſudden unexpected deaths are we daily alarmed with? How oft does it happen, according to the caſe in the parable, when men are bleſſing themſelves with the ſmiling proſpect of a happy and proſperous life, *that very night their ſouls are required of them.* What a frail and ſlender thing is the thread of our lives? how eaſily and ſoon may it be cut aſunder? Of what an infinity of curious tender parts are our bodies compoſed, the leaſt of which being violently broken, or otherways indiſpoſed for action, may bring on

* Eccleſ. ix. 12.

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the ſudden diſſolution of the whole. And how do we know, when thus dallying and trifling, when thus preſuming on our lives and the continuance of our days, but this may be our fate? May not death be ſecretly lying in wait for us, and attacking us as it were by ſtealth; or may not ſome diſeaſe within, unfelt by us, be working our deſtruction? May we not ſink into the inviſible ſtate in a moment, and be carried into the preſence of our awful Judge, without being allowed the ſmalleſt time to implore his mercy, or to prepare ourſelves for ſo ſolemn an appearance? The preſent moment is only ours, and we are not ſure of to-morrow; this day therefore ought we to do, what we would wiſh to have done when we come to die. But then,

II. LET us abſtract from this, and ſuppoſe ourſelves certain of our lives for a courſe of years to come; yet, by delaying the buſineſs of religion from time to time,

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our minds become more averſe to it, and the work itſelf becomes more hard and difficult. How many are there, who from a Chriſtian education have got ſuch good impreſſions, as cannot be entirely effaced or baniſhed from their minds, and yet labour under the power of a fatal deluſion? Senſible they are of the importance of religion, and reſolve to apply their minds to it with care and diligence; but now perhaps they are engaged in a hurry of buſineſs, which entirely conſumes their time; or they are indulging a favourite paſſion which they cannot reſiſt; but they hope ſoon to get the better of it, and then will they mind the great buſineſs of their lives with calmneſs and attention. But a conduct more fooliſh and abſurd than this cannot eaſily be imagined. *This is a way which ſeemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.** Do the cares of this life, the purſuit of the riches, honours and pleaſures of this world haraſs your minds now, and will theſe avocations

* Prov. xiv. 12.

do

do you think ſhortly ceaſe, and of themſelves give place to purſuits of a higher and more exalted nature? No: the world has attractions fatally ſucceſsful for every age of man; and as it preſents its ſenſual joys and gaudy magnificence to thoughtleſs youth, ſo its riches and honours attract thoſe of riper years, and have power to enſlave old age itſelf with all its wiſdom and experience. How oft may we ſee men even on the utmoſt verge of life overwhelm'd with wordly cares, panting after worldly riches, and the ſooner they are to part with them ſeeming to embrace them with greater keenneſs, and to cling the faſter to them? In vain then do we wait for minds more diſengaged from the cares of the world, and freed from its avocations; and as vainly do we hope for the time, when thoſe ſinful paſſions, we now indulge in our breaſts, ſhall loſe their power, and the diſtaſte, they now give us at religion, ſhall wear off and fail. Sin is the moſt deceitful thing in the world.

When

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When firſt we begin to taſte of its falſe pleaſures, we find an uneaſy ſhame, an inward remorſe. We abhor the thoughts of a habit of wickedneſs; but of this, by one indulgence or two, we think ourſelves in no great danger. But one indulgence ſtill authorizes and pleads for another; our virtuous ſhame inſenſibly decays; ſin becomes familiar to us; by every repeated act it gathers ſtrength in the mind; till at length it erects its throne in our heart, and eſtabliſhes a dominion to itſelf within us, which we become utterly unable to ſhake off. There is a progreſs in ſin, and no man at once becomes deſperately wicked.

As it is with the diſeaſes of the body, which the more inveterate they are, prove the more incurable; as the diſtemper, which if taken in time might have been eaſily removed, will, if allowed to go on, baffle the art of the moſt ſkilful phyſician, and the force of the ſtrongeſt medicines;

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juſt ſo it is with ſin, the vileſt diſeaſe and poiſon of the ſoul: as ſoon may *the Ethiopian change his skin, and the leopard his ſpots*, as he that is *accuſtomed to do evil learn to do well.* It is a common obſervation, that cuſtom is a ſecond nature; let us accuſtom ourſelves to any thing even of the moſt trifling nature, it is with the greateſt difficulty imaginable we can wean ourſelves from it. Such is the force of cuſtom, even where our paſſions are ſcarce at all concerned. But how much more muſt this be the caſe in the practice of ſin, to which our corrupt natures have ſo ſtrong a biaſs, to which our irregular paſſions drive us with ſo terrible a force? By a long continued courſe of wickedneſs and vice, conſcience, that witneſs for God within us, is overwhelm'd and ſtiffled. We have ſcorned its checks, and given a deaf ear to all its friendly admonitions. Wearied out with ſuch repeated inſults, it becomes ſilent at laſt, and ceaſes to reprove us. This *candle of the Lord* is extinguiſhed,

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ed, and we are left in darkneſs to continue our fatal ſleep. In ſhort, a courſe of ſin impairs our reaſon, weakens our underſtanding and judgment, perverts the will; nay will almoſt obliterate and deface that ſenſe of moral good and evil which God has planted in our natures. And how hard, how difficult muſt it be to conquer ſuch indiſpoſitions as theſe, to root out ſuch inveterate habits; to awaken ſuch a drowſy ſoul; to cure a diſeaſe that has had ſo long poſſeſſion, and has ſpread its malign influence over the whole of our frame! Can any thing then be more fooliſh, than with a ſtupid careleſsneſs to allow it thus to grow, and to indulge it when growing upon us, in hope that we ſhall afterwards more eaſily conquer it?

BUT let us even ſuppoſe the caſe to be, as thoſe perſons vainly expect, that after ſometime they might find themſelves more at leiſure, and more inclined to engage in the ſervice of God and religion; yet is this

this conduct and proceeding of theirs the moſt unreaſonable and inconſiſtent thing in the world. Repentance for the offences of our paſt life is neceſſarily the firſt ſtep in religion, without which we can never be intitled to the favour of God, or expect the pardon of our ſins. This repentance, if it be true and genuine, muſt be accompanied with the deepeſt ſorrow and contrition of ſoul, and the greateſt ſelf-abhorrence for our diſobedience and ingratitude to God, our beſt friend; for the contempt which we have ſhown of his laws, and the dreadful danger to which we have expoſed ourſelves. Now, can there be any thing more abſurd, than to continue in the practice of thoſe things, which we reſolve afterwards to repent of; to take pleaſure in the commiſſion of thoſe ſins, which we reſolve afterwards to be heartily grieved for; to add wickedneſs to wickedneſs, when we know, that this will add ſorrow to ſorrow, and double our affliction? Is this acting like a rational creature? Will

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man in the common affairs of life engage in a deſign, when he knows he ſhall certainly repent his having ever meddled with it, and ſhall heartily condemn himſelf for it? or, when he finds the miſtake, while he has yet power to draw back, will he ſtill go on and involve himſelf deeper in the miſchief? yet ſuch is our conduct in matters of infinitely higher moment.

III. THE next thing we propoſed to illuſtrate was, That ſuppoſing this delay produced no change to the worſe, either in our own minds or in the work of religion, in which we propoſe to engage; yet the ſeaſons of old age or ſickneſs, to which we delay it, are in themſelves exceedingly improper for the management of a buſineſs ſo weighty and great. Old age, ſhould we arrive at it, has been found by experience, to be a ſufficient burden to itſelf, tho' it be not loaded with what ought to have been the work of our more vigorous years. *Sufficient for that day is*

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*the evil thereof. The ſtrength of the old man,* ſays the Pſalmiſt, *is labour and ſorrow.* The powers both of body and mind are then decayed. We have loſt that quickneſs of apprehenſion, that ſoundneſs of judgment and reaſon, that ſtrength of memory, that warmth and vigour of affection, which we before enjoyed; and our bodies crazy and infirm, fertile of diſeaſes and pains, ſerve only to clog and bear down the ſoul. In theſe evil unpleaſant days the wiſe man will leave nothing to be done, but ſummon up, with his little remaining force of mind, all the comforts of religion and virtue, the conſcious reflexion on a well ſpent life, and the joyful proſpect of approaching bliſs, that by theſe he may be enabled to bear with patience the ſorrows he is ſurrounded with, and with decency to lay down this tabernacle of clay. But how miſerable muſt he be, who then, in place of all theſe comforts, poſſeſſes only the follies of his youth; who has ſpent the day in which he ought

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to have wrought the work for which he was ſent into the world, in idleneſs; and finds, that now, when the night is come on, he muſt begin to work; who, when he is ſo ſoon to die, finds that he has not yet begun to live! Can any man upon the ſmalleſt reflection, think it wiſe or rational to leave ſo momentuous and difficult a work to ſo weak, ſo impotent an age.

BUT then further, are there not ſome whoſe folly riſes to a yet greater height? So much are their minds bewitched with the pleaſures of ſin, that, whilſt they enjoy the leaſt remains of health, they are loth to part with them; thinking it will be full time for this, when ſickneſs the forerunner of death overtakes them. When they are no more able to gratify their paſſions, they reſolve to mortify them; and ſeriouſly to repent that ever they were engaged in ſo wicked a courſe, when they can do no better. Could it ever have been thought, that a being whom the bleſſed

bleſſed God made after his own image, and endued with the noble faculties of underſtanding and wiſdom; a being who, in the little trifling affairs of life, can ſhow ſo much wiſdom and prudence, ſhould be ſo infatuated in matters of the higheſt concern! Not to mention again, that death by its ſudden approach may rob us of this time we deſtine to religion, and hurry us into the inviſible world, without allowing us one moment's thought or preparation: can any man of common ſenſe perſuade himſelf, that this is a ſeaſon proper for a work ſo great and difficult, when the body is racked with pains, or oppreſſed with ſickneſs; when a deadly languor hangs on all our ſenſes, and every nerve within us ſtarts at its approaching diſſolution; when every returning pang disjoints our thoughts; when the tears of our ſurrounding friends, and the thoughts of the laſt, the mournful parting, overcome our ſouls; when the anguiſh of a guilty mind, and the confounding dread of approach-

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ing vengeance complete the ſcene of horror. Is this a ſeaſon fit for a work requiring calmneſs of thought and ſedate reflexion? Have we ever been viſited with pain and ſickneſs, and can we ſay, that then our minds were in a proper ſtate for managing any buſineſs of importance? Have we not frequently ſeen our dying friends in ſuch diſtreſs and agony as called forth the livelieſt ſorrow? and can we place ourſelves in the ſame circumſtances, and yet reſolve to delay to that period, the care of our ſouls and the making our peace with God?

BUT let us abſtract even from this; let us put the caſe in the moſt favourable view, and ſuppoſe that there were nothing in this ſtate that render'd us unfit for ſo great a work; yet how can we be aſſured of the truth and ſincerity of ſuch a death-bed repentance? how do we know but all theſe tears, and this grief and ſorrow may be extorted from us ſolely by the views

views of impending miſery? May we not often have ſeen men in ſuch a ſituation, giving all the evidences of a ſeemingly ſincere repentance, and declaring their fixed reſolution, if God will ſpare them, to live in another manner than they have formerly done? But no ſooner are they reſtored to health, but all theſe reſolutions are forgot; every good impreſſion vaniſhes, and they become twofold more the children of hell than they were before. And how can any man in the ſame circumſtances be aſſured that his repentance is better than this? Can he know whether it be ſuch as would work a laſting change, a thorough reformation in his life, and conſequently ſuch as ſhall be accepted of God? And how wretched is the ſtate of the departing ſoul, when under this uncertainty? What has he to ſupport him in his wreſtling with death, in his conflict with the king of terrors? What dreadful horror muſt overwhelm the ſoul that ſtands thus trembling on the confines of

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an eternal world; who has miſery in all its moſt ghaſtly ſhapes preſented to his view; and ſcarcely dares to hope that his offended God will ſave him from it. Dreadful are the agonies of death, but more dreadful are the agonies of a mind thus diſtracted. The death of the beſt of men we reckon but a mournful ſpectacle; but the death of a man departing in terrors of conſcience, is the moſt tragical ſight our eyes can poſſibly behold.----But to proceed; were there nothing in the times of old age, or ſickneſs, that rendered them unfit for beginning our application to religion, yet there is another conſideration which ſhows the folly of delaying it till then in a very clear light; and this I mentioned as the

IV. HEAD of diſcourſe, That by ſpending our ſtrength and vigour in the ſervice of ſin, and allotting only theſe worſt of our days to religion and the ſervice of God, we become unworthy of his favour, and

and may provoke him juſtly to deny us that grace which we have ſo often deſpiſed and rejected. That the aſſiſtance of the Spirit of God is neceſſary in order to our converſion from ſin to holineſs, is ſo clearly revealed to us, that tho' many have been the diſputes about the manner of its operation, and the degree of its efficacy, yet few or none have been ſo extravagant as entirely to deny it. *The way of man is not now in himſelf; our ſufficiency is of God*, and it is he that *worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleaſure.* As it was by the almighty power of God that we were brought into life, ſo by the ſame power we muſt be *created again unto good works*, and *renewed in the ſpirit of our minds.* This aſſiſtance and gracious influence is daily offered to us in the goſpel; where we are called to *ask and we ſhall receive, to ſeek and we ſhall find, to knock and it ſhall be opened unto us.** And if we take the matter in this light, to all the folly

* Matth. vii. 7.

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and danger we have already ſeen in this conduct of delaying the work of religion, this farther is added, that it is preſuming upon the goodneſs and mercy of God; that tho' we continue thro' the whole of our lives dishonouring his laws, and contemning his authority, yet whenſoever the views of death and judgment, and the terrors of his wrath ſhall make us wiſh to be reconciled to him, he will certainly extend his mercy to us, and ſave us from deſtruction.

FALSE notions of God, wrong apprehenſions of the great Governor and Judge of the world, are the ſource of innumerable miſchiefs to the children of men. We ſet the divine perfections at variance amongſt themſelves, and according to the prevailing temper and diſpoſition of our minds we entertain ſuch notions of one perfection as are abſolutely inconſiſtent with the reſt. Are we under the power of dejection and melancholy? the divine holineſs

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and juſtice appear to us in ſo dreadful a light, as is inconſiſtent with infinite goodneſs and everlaſting love; and our gloomy conceptions are ready to drive us into diſtraction and deſpair. Again, are we bleſſed with proſperity and eaſe, does the world ſmile upon us, ſo that we are *walking in the ſight of our eyes*, and indulging ourſelves in whatever our hearts deſire? then we are apt to conceive of the Deity as a Being of ſuch unbounded goodneſs and mercy, as is inconſiſtent with infinite wiſdom, righteouſneſs and truth. And how ready are ſuch notions to ſoothe us in our ſins, and to inſpire us with a preſumptuous ſecurity. God indeed is infinitely good, he *delights to exerciſe loving kindneſs on the earth*, and *his tender mercies are over all his works*: yet we muſt believe, if we would conceive aright of the Supreme Being, that there is between theſe amiable perfections and the other excellencies of his nature a conſtant and eternal harmony. And tho' we ignorant

mortals

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mortals muſt not dare to ſet bounds and limits to the divine goodneſs; for the *heaven is not higher than the earth, than his ways are above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts*; yet may we ſafely ſay, that all ſuch notions of the goodneſs of God as encourage us in a courſe of action contrary to the rectitude of his nature, and the authority of his laws, muſt be falſe and dangerous. From theſe general thoughts, let us proceed to examine the preſent caſe.

WE know that God has a right to the ſervice of our whole lives; that he abhors the wicked, and is *angry with the ſinner every day*; that *all things are naked and open before him*, and that he ſees the inmoſt ſecrets of our ſouls: yet we reſolve with ourſelves, that we will follow our ſinful luſts and pleaſures, as long as we can, or have the leaſt reliſh for them; and when that is gone, we will betake ourſelves to God, who, we hope, will kindly receive us.

us. We cannot think of giving him the beſt of our days, but we hope he will be willing to accept of the worſt. We grudge him an *acceptable offering*, becauſe we hope he will receive from our hands *the blind and the lame*. We chuſe *other lords to rule over us*, promiſing ourſelves, that when we are no more able to ſerve our beloved maſters, the moſt high God will welcome us when worn out and decrepit in the ſlavery of ſin and Satan, and will exalt us to *the inheritance of the ſaints in light*. But is not this a mocking of God? Can ſuch notions of goodneſs be conſiſtent with infinite perfection, with unſpotted purity, with unerring wiſdom? If a ſervant ſhould entirely neglect the work committed to him by his maſter, and take every opportunity, even to his face, to expreſs contempt of him and diſregard of his authority, encouraging himſelf in this courſe of diſobedience, from an impudent confidence in his maſter's goodneſs; that whenever he ſhall judge it convenient for his own

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own purpoſes to apply for it, his maſter will receive him into his favour: is it poſſible that this ſervant can eſteem his maſter a wiſe man? muſt he not have the loweſt thoughts of his underſtanding and judgment, and from his heart deſpiſe him? Yet thus it is that men pretend to deal with Him who is *mighty in judgment, and whoſe underſtanding is infinite.*

THERE is one paſſage of ſcripture, upon which men are ready to build their vain deluding hopes of this kind, and that is the inſtance of the thief on the croſs: an inſtance which has in it ſo many circumſtances entirely ſingular, that it cannot with the leaſt ſhadow of reaſon be brought as an encouragement to that conduct which we are now arguing againſt. Here we have a poor creature, whoſe manner of life, and the clandeſtine wickedneſs in which he was engaged, had probably given him little or no opportunity of beholding the miracles, or hearing the doctrine of the Saviour

viour of the world. He now ſees him his fellow-ſufferer, hanging upon the neighbouring croſs; the rulers and croud of ſpectators ſhaking their heads at him, the ſoldiers mocking and inſulting him, and even the other malefactor forgetting his own condition, to deride and upbraid him. Him the penitent thief rebukes, *Doſt thou not fear God*, ſays he, *ſeeing thou art under the ſame condemnation; and we indeed juſtly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man hath done nothing amiſs.*† And having thus expreſſed the deep ſenſe he had of his own crime, and of the puniſhment it deſerved, and having acknowledged the innocence of our Lord, then, notwithſtanding that every circumſtance ſeemed to concur againſt it, he owns him as the Saviour of the world, who alone could deliver him from eternal wrath; *Lord remember me when thou comeſt into thy kingdom.* A faith ſo noble on a Saviour dying on the croſs, joined with a ſincere repen-

† Luke xxiii. 40.

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repentance of his former crimes, was accepted by Chriſt. *Verily I ſay unto thee, this day thou ſhalt be with me in paradiſe.*--- But will our caſe in the leaſt degree be parallel to this. If having enjoyed the cleareſt diſpenſation of the Goſpel; having had the way of life and the way of death fully ſet before us, we *receive this grace of God in vain*; if we harden our hearts againſt him, nay, *ſin* yet *the more becauſe his grace aboundeth*; the moſt that poſſibly can be deduced from this inſtance is, that God may in certain extraordinary circumſtances extend his grace and mercy to a penitent ſinner, even in his laſt moments: this is what no body ever denied; yet it is certain, that to preſume upon it is the moſt fooliſh and dangerous thing in the world. Will any man ſwallow a draught of deadly poiſon, becauſe it is poſſible he may find an antidote that will conquer its pernicious force? Will any man throw himſelf from the height of a precipice, in expectation of catching at ſome buſh or ſhrub

ſhrub that may break his fall? Will any man expoſe himſelf to ſhipwreck, from the hope of eſcaping on a broken plank? Yet no wiſer are they, who adventure to perſiſt in ſin, the *wages of which is death*; who run on boldly in theſe paths that lead to deſtruction, and promiſe themſelves, that when they are come to the very brink of miſery, God, whom they have all along affronted and deſpiſed, will beſtow his extraordinary grace, and interpoſe to deliver them from that ruin they have brought upon themſelves.

I SHOULD now make ſome reflexions on what has been ſaid; but your time allows me only to ſuggeſt, that the great deſign of all that has been now ſaid is, to incite us to ſuch a conſideration as becomes men and reaſonable creatures. The conduct we have been conſidering is, perhaps, what no man in calm blood ever pretended to defend or vindicate. It is no diſputable point, where we need eloquence and art

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to gain the aſſent, and convince the mind: whoſoever fairly ſtates the caſe to himſelf, will in a moment ſee which ſide his reaſon muſt approve of. But here lyes the grand difficulty, to bring men to think of the ſubject, with that attention and ſerioufneſs which its weight and moment deſerves. A ſurpriſing thing indeed! that we ſhould need perſuaſion to make us think of what alone is worthy of our thoughts; and that we ſhould be ſo much employed as to allow no time for what is the chief buſineſs of our lives. Yet certain it is, that inconſideration is the fatal ſnare, the ruin of the children of men. Our minds are hurried on from one fooliſh purſuit to another; and if at any time theſe occupations ſhould chance to fail us, and we ſhould be left at leiſure with ourſelves, we reckon it a gap in our lives; our minds will wander *with the fools eyes to the ends of the earth*; we will think of any thing, of every thing, rather than of that which moſt nearly concerns us. But can there

there be any thing more unworthy of a rational creature? can there be any thing ſo ſhameful, as to allow his reaſon, which was given him by God to enable him to diſtinguiſh between good and evil, to be ſo cheated, ſo abuſed, ſo baffled? Let us ſuppoſe, that after ſome conſideration it remained a queſtion, which were the more advantageous courſe, the practice of religion or of wickedneſs. Was this the caſe, as it is impoſſible that ever it can be, would it not be the duty of a rational creature to inquire with the utmoſt diligence, till he found out the truth in a queſtion of ſuch moment and importance? But when upon the ſmalleſt, the moſt ſuperficial reflexion, we muſt give religion and the care of our ſouls the preference; can there be any thing more fooliſh and abſurd, than to allow thoſe things, which we muſt confeſs to be of infinitely leſſer moment, to baniſh it wholly from our thoughts?

WE are placed here to prepare ourſelves for

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for another and a more laſting ſtate. The eternal happineſs or miſery of our beings depend on our improvement of the ſhort uncertain ſpace that is allotted us here on earth. Much of this time we have already trifled away in idleneſs, and how much, or how little remains we can by no means know. And will we yet go on thoughtleſs and ſecure? Strange infatuation! thus to ſuffer ourſelves to be driven blindfold into a courſe of action, for which we muſt often reproach ourſelves, which every interval of reaſon will condemn, and which at length may land us in endleſs miſery. Let us bethink ourſelves, my brethren, whilſt time for thought yet remains; *let us quit ourſelves like men*; now while it is *the accepted time*, and *the day of ſalvation*, let us mind the *things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes.* Now let us *remember our Creator, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, in which we ſhall ſay we have no pleaſure in them.*

SER-

# SERMON VII.

Preached in the High-Church of *Edinburgh*, *January* 7. 1751, before the Society for propagating Chriſtian Knowledge.

## Of CHRISTIAN ZEAL.

GALATIANS iv. 18.

*But it is good to be zealouſly affected always in a good thing.*

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MANY of the *Jews* who embraced the religion of Chriſt, when it was firſt publiſhed by the apoſtles, ſtill retained too great a fondneſs for the ritual inſtitutions of *Moſes*. They were bred up in ſuch a profound veneration of their law, that they could not be perſuaded that any thing could make void their obligation to

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obey it. They inclined therefore to blend the two diſpenſations, and join the obſervation of the legal ceremonies to the pure and ſpiritual precepts of the Goſpel. This weakneſs of the *Jewiſh* converts was for ſome time connived at, till in the height of their zeal they would have impoſed circumciſion, and their other rites on the gentiles who had embraced the Chriſtian faith: then the apoſtles were obliged with boldneſs to aſſert that *liberty with which Chriſt had made them free*; to command the gentiles to maintain the native ſimplicity of the Goſpel, and to reſiſt thoſe who would wreathe about their necks a yoke which neither the *Jews* nor their fathers had been able to bear.

As certain falſe teachers of this kind had crept in amongſt the *Galatians*, diſturbing their peace, and corrupting the purity of the Goſpel; it was the apoſtle's deſign in this epiſtle to warn theſe Chriſtians of their danger, if they allowed them-

themſelves to be ſeduced into ſuch errors, and held not faſt the profeſſion of the true faith, in which they had been inſtructed. Among the other arts uſed to deceive the *Galatians*, it had been inſinuated, that *Paul*, who had firſt preached the Goſpel to them, was not truly an apoſtle clothed with ſuch authority as *Peter* and others of the circumciſion: in oppoſition to which, the inſpired writer begins with a ſolemn vindication of his apoſtleſhip, ſhowing, that in no ſpiritual gift, or extraordinary power, he was inferior to the chief of the apoſtles.

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FROM this he proceeds to ſhow, by ſeveral arguments, how inconſiſtent theſe new doctrines were with the nature, deſign, and extent of the Goſpel covenant. And that he might leave no means untried to guard them againſt the dangerous arts of theſe ſeducers, in the context he puts them in mind of the love and affection, the reſpect and veneration which they had

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before ſhown for himſelf; expoſtulating with them concerning the occaſion of ſo ſudden a change; that they who had lately *received him as an angel of God, even as Jeſus Chriſt*, and were ready, as the apoſtle ſtrongly expreſſes it, to *have pluckt out their very eyes, and have given them to him*, ſhould now be ſo fond of other teachers, who were his avowed oppoſers, and of another Goſpel, ſo contrary to that which he had taught them, and which they had received as the greateſt *bleſſedneſs*. Upon this occaſion he introduces the general propoſition, which I have read as the foundation of the preſent diſcourſe. *It is good to be zealouſly affected always in a good thing.* In the words we have a duty required of us, to be *zealouſly affected*; a limitation of this duty, that we muſt be *zealouſly affected in a good thing*; and a commendation of the duty, that it *is good* to be thus zealouſly affected in a good thing. In further diſcourſing on them, I ſhall, with divine aſſiſtance, proceed in the following method.

I. I SHALL

I. I SHALL explain the nature of zeal in general.

II. I SHALL lay before you the neceſſary qualifications of Chriſtian zeal; by which we may be directed in the exerciſe of it, and enabled to diſtinguiſh betwixt true and falſe zeal.

III. I SHALL ſhow the excellency, and the happy effects of true Chriſtian zeal.

AND, in the laſt place, make improvement of the ſubject.

*Firſt*, I SHALL endeavour to explain the nature of zeal in general. Ancient writers in that language from which we have borrowed the word *zeal*, uſe it indifferently in a good or bad ſenſe, but ſeldom or never in a religious one: with them it commonly ſignifies warmth and fervour, an earneſt deſire of ſome temporal good; ſuch a deſire, as is attended with pain and uneaſineſs, when others are poſſeſſed of that good which we are deprived of. They frequently

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frequently apply it to denote emulation, and that ſort of it too which is accompanied with envy, contention and ſtrife. In the like bad ſenſe the word is frequently uſed by the writers of the New Teſtament; and zeal is numbered by them amongſt the *works of the fleſh*, amongſt the baſeſt and moſt unworthy paſſions. Our tranſlators indeed, in rendering theſe paſſages, have prudently declined to uſe the word *zeal*; applying other words, which more clearly convey to the *Engliſh* reader the meaning and import of the original. Thus they expreſs it by *envy* and *envyings*, *emulation*, *indignation*, and the like, with the particular inſtances of which I ſhall not now detain you.

BUT is it not juſt matter of regret and ſorrow, that in all the ages of the church there have been too many Chriſtians zealous rather in this ſenſe of the word than in the other, which it alſo frequently bears in ſcripture, and which expreſſes one of the brighteſt ornaments of the true Chriſtian?

ſtian? Sometimes it denotes an ardent deſire of promoting the glory of God, and the honour of his worſhip, in oppoſition to a profane indifference, and a cold unconcern about theſe things. *The zeal of thine houſe*, ſaith our Lord, applying the words of the Pſalmiſt, *hath eaten me up.** By this the apoſtle expreſſes the ſincere and earneſt deſire he had for the ſalvation of the ſouls of men. *I am zealous of you*, ſays he to the *Corinthians, with a godly zeal.*† In the ſame terms he ſpeaks of the generous charity which that church had ſhown in relieving the neceſſities of the ſaints. *I know the forwardneſs of your mind*, ſays he, *and your zeal which hath provoked many.*‡ *It is good*, ſays he again, *to be zealouſly affected always in a good thing.*

Now from theſe paſſages we may be able to form ſome notion of that zeal which is required of Chriſtians, and which is a neceſſary qualification in the

* John ii. 17. † 2 Cor. xi. 2. ‡ 2 Cor. ix. 2.

ſervice

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ſervice of God. It is a vehement affection of mind, which incites us earneſtly to wiſh and contend for the honour of God, and for the prevalency of true and undefiled religion in ourſelves and others; and which moves us, on the other hand, conſtantly and irreconcilably to oppoſe whatever is contrary to theſe noble ends. We are not then to conceive of Chriſtian zeal, as if it were one ſingle affection of the ſoul, but as a mixture of many holy and ſpiritual affections. It is not properly one particular grace, but rather a gracious conſtitution of the whole mind. Zeal ſways all the thoughts, and governs the whole will of the true Chriſtian. Zeal gives a double meaſure of force and activity to that religion, which before was ſincere. Zeal, in ſhort, is to the ſpiritual life, what health and ſtrength is to the natural; it renders that cheerful and vigorous, which otherways would but breath and move. So much may ſuffice as to the firſt thing propoſed, the ſtating and explaining

plaining the juſt notion of zeal in general. Let us now proceed to the



*Second* THING propoſed, namely, To lay before you the neceſſary qualifications of this zeal, by which we may be directed in the exerciſe of it, and be enabled to diſtinguiſh between true and falſe zeal.

SUCH is the weakneſs and infirmity of human nature, that here we are ready to be entangled in the moſt dangerous miſtakes and errors. It is no doubt extremely hard ſo to moderate our affections towards objects which are widely different in themſelves, as not to err in their meaſure and degree. It is in a moſt particular manner difficult to manage our zeal in the hatred of, and oppoſition to that which is evil, ſo as that it ſhall at the ſame time be conſiſtent with that love and kindneſs, that humility and prudence, that meekneſs and gentleneſs which are required of Chriſtians; yet certain it is, that if our zeal be inconſiſtent with

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with theſe graces, we thereby rather diſhonour God than promote his glory, and we do more to hurt than to benefit our ſouls.

THIS ought to be attended to with the greater care, that however valuable an ornament true zeal may be to the Chriſtian, yet zeal, if miſguided or miſapplied, may prove the ſource of the moſt dreadful miſchiefs: nay, ſuch zeal has actually, in numberleſs inſtances, brought the greateſt diſcredit on religion, and produced the moſt fatal deſolation in the church of Chriſt. To direct us then in the management of zeal, and to guard us againſt ſuch miſtakes, let us attend to the following particulars.

1*ſt*, OUR zeal muſt always be according to knowledge; and if it is not ſo, it is highly blameable, for a very obvious reaſon, becauſe it is extremely dangerous. This kind of zeal the apoſtle condemns in his brethren the *Jews*; *I bear them record*, ſays

ſays he, *that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.* * Nay, he acknowledges, that before his converſion, he himſelf was zealous in this manner; and that this zeal led him to *perſecute the church of Chriſt, and to think himſelf bound to do many things contrary to the name of Jeſus.* A Chriſtian, as the apoſtle tells us, ought to be ready to *give to him that aſketh him a reaſon of the hope that is in him*; and ſurely he is as much bound to be able to give a reaſon of the zeal that is in him.

TRUE Chriſtian zeal then muſt not only be free from all hypocriſy and guile, but it muſt be founded on knowledge, and proceed from a well informed judgment. We muſt love and deſire that which we know and are aſſured to be worthy of our love and purſuit; and we muſt oppoſe that which on good grounds we know to be criminal and dangerous;

* Rom. x. 2.

for

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for otherways our zeal may prove but a fooliſh heat or a blind fury. And from this rule, ſo obvious and reaſonable in itſelf, we may ſafely infer, that great zeal in perſons notoriouſly ignorant muſt always be liable to great ſuſpicion. True zeal will always ariſe from true knowledge, will always be accompanied with it, and governed by it.

2*dly*, OUR zeal muſt be exerciſed concerning that which is good in itſelf, and the meaſures of it muſt be regulated with prudence, according to the real importance of the object about which it is employed. It is only *in a good thing*, as the apoſtle directs in the text, that *it is good to be zealouſly affected*. We muſt not only be aſſured in general, that our zeal is not entirely miſplaced, as to the object of it; but we muſt be able to judge of its greater or leſſer importance, as to the great ends of religion, the honour and glory of God, and the ſalvation of mankind; and we muſt

muſt temper and proportion our zeal accordingly. If this is neglected, the conſequence will infallibly be, that indiſcreetly laying out our warmth and heat on leſſer things, we will be ready either altogether to neglect, or coldly to purſue what is of much higher concern and moment.

OF this kind of falſe zeal we find our bleſſed Lord accuſing the Scribes and Phariſees of old. *Wo unto you Scribes and Phariſees, hypocrites,* ſays he, *for ye pay tithe of mint, aniſe and cumin, and neglect the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and truth: theſe ought ye to have done, and not to leave the others undone. Ye blind guides, which ſtrain at a gnat, and ſwallow a camel. Wo unto you Scribes and Phariſees, hypocrites, for ye make clean the outſide of the cup and platter, but within they are full of extortion and exceſs. Thou blind Phariſee, cleanſe firſt that which is within the cup and platter, that the outſide of them may be clean alſo.* ‡ Such are

‡ Math. xxiii. 23---27.

the

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the unhappy conſequences of our ſpending our zeal on little matters: it naturally takes off our minds from what is of higher moment, and leaves us no zeal or fervency to be láid out on thoſe things in which the intereſts of religion and of our immortal ſouls are more nearly concerned. As it is too certain a ſign of folly and weakneſs to be earneſt and eager for all things alike, ſo the wiſe, the prudent Chriſtian will diſtinguiſh between the ſeveral objects on which he employs his zeal, and allow to each that meaſure of concern and warmth, which its weight and moment deſerves. But then,

3*dly*, SUPPOSING us to be aſſured that the object of our zeal is right in itſelf, and perhaps too a matter of great concernment; yet we muſt take care, that it carry us not unawares into unlawful means in the proſecution of its end. That the goodneſs of the end will ſanctify the means, that we may do evil that good may come

come of it, are ſcandalous principles; and the apoſtle expreſly aſſerts it to be a damnable ſin, to charge ſuch doctrines on the religion of the bleſſed Jeſus. *Some affirm*, ſays he, *that we ſay, let us do evil that good may come, whoſe damnation is juſt.*‡ The true Chriſtian will watch over himſelf, leſt he fall into this ſnare; and in particular will find the exerciſe of care and circumſpection needful for this end, when he is called to exert his zeal in oppoſing what he believes to be dishonourable to God, and contrary to pure religion.

LOVE to God and to the truths of God; deſire to promote his glory and the happineſs of mankind, are affections which ought to have the firſt and the chief place in our hearts. In theſe we can never be too fervent, for they will never carry us beyond due bounds. On the other hand, our hatred againſt thoſe things which

‡ Rom. iii. 8.

God

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God hates, our indignation againſt whatever is diſpleaſing and dishonourable to him; theſe, no doubt, ſhould alſo employ our zeal, and are acceptable in the ſight of God. But here we muſt beware and carefully attend, leſt this kind of zeal exceed its due bounds, and inſenſibly degenerate into the moſt vitious and hurtful paſſions, into anger and ill-nature, wrath and malice. For ſuch is the nature of the human heart, that there is great danger, leſt, under the appearance of hatred to ſin, our zeal carry us further than mere deteſtation of the ſin itſelf, and lead us unawares to the hatred of the perſon, whom we are commanded to pity and to pray for, and with meekneſs and gentleneſs to endeavour his recovery. And from this we are led to notice another very probable mark by which we may diſtinguiſh between the zeal that becomes a Chriſtian, and thoſe other paſſions that have ſometimes paſſed under this honourable name; this I ſhall mention as the,

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4*th* AND laſt thing under this head, That true Chriſtian zeal will appear more in the mild and gentle affections, than in thoſe that are wrathful and violent. It will diſcover itſelf more in the ardency of his love to God, in the fervency of his devotion, in the warmth of his kindneſs and charity towards his brethren, than in the vehemence of his hatred and deteſtation and anger, even tho' theſe paſſions are not altogether miſapplied as to their objects.

IT has been juſtly obſerved by an ingenious author, that zeal ſhould be in religion, what true courage is in human nature. And as that is the trueſt courage, which is not only firm and undaunted, but at the ſame time calm and inoffenſive, ſlow to anger, and not ready to be provoked; ſo that is true Chriſtian zeal, which is not only conſtant daring and fearleſs, but meek and compaſſionate, long-ſuffering and *eaſy to be entreated*, without bitterneſs

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or gall. Muſt it not be matter of wonder to every one who ſeriouſly reflects upon it, that in the profeſſion of ſuch a religion as the Chriſtian, our zeal ſhould ſhow itſelf ſo very little in theſe gentler paſſions, and ſhould vent itſelf almoſt always in thoſe of an oppoſite nature? Yet is this ſo much the caſe, that our very notions of zeal are almoſt entirely preverted by it; and no ſooner we hear the name, than we are ready to form the idea of ſomething harſh and auſtere, unfriendly and cenſorious. But certain it is, that as no religion is *pure*, that is not at the ſame time *peaceable* and gentle, ſo no zeal is true, ſpiritual, and Chriſtian, that is not merciful, charitable and kind.

By attending to theſe things we may eaſily diſtinguiſh true Chriſtian zeal from the unruly heats of pride and paſſion, and the implacable fury of revenge. Theſe indeed have frequently been concealed under the honourable name of zeal for God and his ſervice; and under this cover have

have often brought the greateſt diſcredit on the religion of Jeſus, and cauſed his bleſſed name to be abhorred and blaſphemed by *them that are without*: when men profeſſing a zeal for God, have pretended to propagate the religion of Chriſt, and promote his glory in the world, not by the demonſtration of the truth, not in the meek and gentle ſpirit of the goſpel, but with the cruelty of the worſt of tyrants, with the rage and fury of devils. This falſe and bitter zeal has made the moſt direful havock even in the boſom of the Chriſtian church, and has filled nations and kingdoms with ſlaughter and blood. An inſatiable thirſt for worldly power and greatneſs, under the mask of holy zeal, has made the *mother of harlots* and *of the abominations of the earth* often *drunk with the blood of the ſaints*, and of the martyrs of Jeſus Chriſt. This falſe zeal has given riſe to rebellions, aſſaſſinations and maſſacres, as means to promote what is falſly called the holy catholic

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faith. This powerful deluſion has made men forget the firſt principles of religion; has diveſted them of the common feelings of humanity; and made them think, that they did God good ſervice by perſecuting their fellow creatures with bonds and chains, with racks and tortures, fire and ſword.-----But this principle is of a nature directly contrary to that fervency and zeal that ought to adorn the lives of Chriſtians. It is zeal in doing good, zeal in promoting the honour of God, (which in no caſe can be inconſiſtent with, nay, which in every inſtance muſt promote the happineſs of his creatures) that alone is worthy of the followers of Jeſus. If our zeal be true and genuine, then, to uſe the words of a worthy author, divine love will fill its ſails, divine wiſdom and prudence will give it ballaſt, and it will have no heat but what is tempered with charity and love.

I PROCEED now to the *Third* thing propoſed

poſed, which was to ſhow the excellency and happy effects of a ſpirit of true Chriſtian zeal. This will clearly appear, when we conſider, that zeal imports in it, our applying ourſelves to all the duties of the Chriſtian life with that warmth of affection, which we ordinarily ſhow in the proſecution of any end to which we are incited by the ſtrongeſt motives.

WHEN we are engaged in the purſuit of any temporal good, the attainment of which we believe to be of high importance to our happineſs; when we are fully ſatisfied that our purſuit is not only innocent but laudable, with what keenneſs and eagerneſs of mind do we proceed in it? how cheerfully will we undergo every hardſhip, encounter every difficulty? and what pleaſure and ſatisfaction have we upon our ſucceſs in it? Now the like, nay a greater fervency and earneſtneſs will the zealous Chriſtian diſcover in the ſervice of God, and in the performance of all the duties

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duties of religion. Oppoſite to this character is that of indifference and lukewarmneſs in religion, and the one may ſerve to throw light upon the other.------How eaſily is the lukewarm Chriſtian diverted from his duty? He lays hold of every ſlight pretence to excuſe him in the neglect of it, and is rather pleaſed than uneaſy when under any plauſible pretext he can decline it. If no ſuch pretext occurs, and he is actually engaged in the ſervice of God, what a dull formal buſineſs does he make of it? how little of that life and ſpirit appears, which he can ſhow on other occaſions? Whatever he does in the ſervice of God, it is but to acquit himſelf of a task aſſigned him; and his whole behaviour ſhows that his heart goes not along with it.

BUT as the zealous Chriſtian will readily embrace every opportunity of doing good, ſo every interruption or hindrance will be a grief to him, and he will endeavour

deavour to avoid it with care. Conſcious as he is, that religion is his great concern, on which his all depends; that it is a thing worthy and honourable in itſelf, and of the moſt bleſſed conſequence, he will ſet about the duties of it with ſuitable application and intention of mind. Theſe paſſions and affections which God hath planted in us as the ſprings of action, which incite and animate others in their lower purſuits, will in him be exerted for a nobler purpoſe, and will inſpire him with activity and vigour, with alacrity and chearfulneſs in the good ways of the Lord. SERM. VII.

VARIOUS are the figures by which we find this zeal in goodneſs repreſented to us in holy ſcripture; all of them expreſſive of that fervency and earneſtneſs which I have juſt now deſcribed. Sometimes it is deſcribed by alluſions to that eager and craving appetite for the refreſhment of nature, by a new ſupply of meat or drink, which is better felt than it can poſſibly

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poſſibly be deſcribed. *Bleſſed are they*, ſays our Lord, *that hunger and thirſt after righteouſneſs. It is my meat*, ſays he again of himſelf, *to do the will of him that ſent me, and to finiſh his work. As the hart*, ſays *David, panteth after the water-brooks, ſo panteth my ſoul after thee, O God. My ſoul thirſteth for God, the living God: when ſhall I come and appear before God?* This zeal again is repreſented by the activity and vigour, and earneſtneſs of deſire, which was ſhown by contenders in the public exerciſes, the maſtery in which was eſteemed the greateſt glory. In alluſion to this, we are called to *forget the things that are behind, to ſtretch forth to the things that are before, that we may attain to the mark and the prize of the high calling of God in Chriſt Jeſus.* As the Chriſtian life is deſcribed in ſcripture as a continued warfare, ſo our zeal in performing all the duties of it is expreſt by the watchfulneſs, the reſolution and boldneſs which is required of ſoldiers engaged in the moſt dangerous

gerous enterprize, ſtationed in the moſt difficult poſt, ſurrounded with the moſt formidable enemies. Thus we are exhorted to be *watchful* and *vigilant*, to *ſtand faſt in the faith, to quit ourſelves like men, and be ſtrong*. To *take unto us the whole armour of God, that we may be able to withſtand in the evil day, and having done all, may ſtand. For we wreſtle not with fleſh and blood, but againſt principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkneſs of this world; againſt ſpiritual wickedneſs in high places.*

FROM theſe things we may be able to form ſome notion of what it is to be zealous in good works. To go through the ſeveral parts of our duty, and to ſhow diſtinctly how our zeal ought to be employed about them, is what I cannot now propoſe. The zealous Chriſtian will hold nothing dear, in compariſon of the favour of God, and of that holineſs which will make him beautiful in the eyes of his Creator. His

ſoul

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ſoul will *delight in the law of the Lord*, and *his deſire will be unto him, and the remembrance of his name.* With what pleaſure and warmth will he apply himſelf to the duties of devotion and worſhip? with what joy will his *lips ſhew forth his greatneſs*, and *ſing of his mercy that endureth for ever?* with what ardour and fervency will he *pour out his heart before him*, and have his recourſe unto him, as *his ſun and his ſhield*, as his *rock*, his *fortreſs*, and his *deliverer?* The *tabernacles of the Lord will be amiable* in his ſight: *a day in his courts will be better than a thouſand elſewhere*; and it will be his conſtant deſire, that *all the people may praiſe the Lord*, and *ſee his glory*, and *bow before him*; and that *his name may be great, from the riſing to the ſetting ſun.*

THE true Chriſtian's zeal for God will alſo manifeſt itſelf in his love and kindneſs to his brethren of mankind, as they are the offſpring of God, and bear his image. He will

will be zealous in *doing good unto all*, but *eſpecially to them who are of the houſhold of faith*, and *members of that body, whereof Jeſus Chriſt is the head.* His zeal will ſhew itſelf in feeding the hungry, in clothing the naked, in providing for the poor and the fatherleſs, in comforting the dejected and ſorrowful, in inſtructing the ignorant, in reproving with meekneſs and prudence thoſe who have gone aſtray, and in bearing with the weakneſſes and infirmities of his brethren. This love and benevolence he will not meanly confine to thoſe of one ſect or opinion. His zeal indeed will move him to wiſh and pray, and ſtrive, that Chriſtians may be joined together in the *unity of the Spirit*, and in the purity of the Goſpel; and he will *contend earneſtly for the faith once delivered to the ſaints:* but if his prayers and labours have not their deſired ſucceſs, his zeal will diſplay itſelf, not in the bitterneſs of wrath, but in the abounding of his charity even to thoſe who differ from him; and theſe differences

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rences in opinion, that muſt prevail while we are in this world, will chiefly affect his zeal in this way, that they will make him long and aſpire the more after that bleſſed ſtate, where all debate and angry controverſy ſhall ceaſe, and where univerſal peace and love ſhall reign for evermore.

I COME now, in the laſt place, to make ſome improvement and application of what has been ſaid. And here I might incite you to this zeal in goodneſs, by laying before you the manifold obligations we are under to it, and the bleſſed fruits and advantages that will attend it. To inſiſt on theſe particularly, would carry me beyond the bounds to which I muſt, in decency, confine myſelf. Have we any regard to the great end of our being, which is by holineſs and goodneſs to promote the glory of him that made us? Have we any dutifulneſs or gratitude to that God on whom we depend for all that

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we are, have, or hope for? Have we any love to our bleſſed Redeemer, any concern for his honour, any regard for what he declares to be the great deſign of his whole kind and merciful undertaking in our behalf? All theſe things loudly call upon us to be zealous in well-doing. This, as the apoſtle tells us, is the great end of our election to eternal life; for *God hath choſen us in Chriſt, before the foundation of the world, that we ſhould be holy and without blame before him in love.* For this end Chriſt laid down his life, *that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us to himſelf, a peculiar people zealous of good works.* For this end he imparts to us the light of his word, the ſtrength and aſſiſtance of his Spirit; for *we are God's workmanſhip, created in Chriſt Jeſus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we ſhould walk in them.* This is the deſign of all the *great and precious promiſes* of the Goſpel, that thereby being *made partakers of a divine nature,*

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*nature, we ſhould perfect holineſs in the fear of God.*

WHAT happy effects would this zeal in goodneſs have on the peace of our minds? By this alone can we know that our faith is true and unfeigned, if it be in us a lively quickening principle of every virtue and grace, and make us to abound in good works. Hereby we are aſſured of the truth of our love to God, if it incites us with ardour and fervency to *run in the way of his commandments.* Nay, what bleſſed effects would this zeal in goodneſs have on all around us, if we made *our light ſo to ſhine before them*, that they *ſeeing our good works*, were led to *glorify our Father in heaven. Our path* would be to them *as the ſhining light*; and by ſetting before them all the *beauty of holineſs*, would attract and command their imitation. By this zeal we ſhould awake the drowſy, quicken the ſlothful, ſtrengthen the weak and feeble, and inſpire the ſincere and upright in heart with

with a holy emulation. Such happy influence would the example of our zeal have upon our brethren. How much do misery and wretchedness abound in the world? Were it not for this heavenly flame which the divine grace kindles and cherishes in the righteous and the good, in some measure to counteract the sad effects of prevailing corruption and wickedness, this world would soon become a most dismal abode. It is this zeal that provides for the poor and the needy, that protects the injured and oppressed, that comforts the desolate and sorrowful, and makes the *heart of the widow and the fatherless to sing for joy*. It is this zeal which animates that best and noblest charity which respects the souls of men, and their spiritual welfare, affording the means of religion and instruction to those that *sit in darkness*; propagating the knowledge of the Gospel of salvation amongst them, who from their situation and circumstances are excluded from these valuable blessings which we enjoy.

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enjoy. And can we conceive, my brethren, any exerciſe of the Chriſtian's zeal more worthy and commendable than this? Is there any good work to which we are bound by ſtronger ties of duty and gratitude to God, of love and thankfulneſs to Jeſus the Saviour, of compaſſion and kindneſs to our brethren of mankind? Has God bleſſed us with a clear diſcovery of his will, and made a glorious light to ſhine on us who *ſat in the ſhadow of death?* and ſhall we not pity thoſe who yet lye in ignorance, and contribute all we can to their receiving the knowledge of the truth? Have we a juſt ſenſe of the horrid barbarity, of the wretched gloomy ſuperſtition from which we are delivered, under which ſo great a part of the world yet groans? do we duly value and eſteem the divine goodneſs towards us? and ſhall we never think of thoſe who *know not the way of peace*, who are worſhipping lying vanities, and bowing down before the works of their own hands? Has God ſo mercifully,

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ſo eminently diſtinguiſhed us from the reſt of mankind, and ſhall not this oblige us to do all we can in our ſeveral ſtations, that his love may be declared, and his name may be worſhipped in the lands where they are not yet known?

THE moſt zealous Chriſtian indeed in his private capacity, farther than by his earneſt prayers and ſupplications, can do little for the accompliſhment of this great and important end. The influence of his moſt active and unwearied endeavours muſt at the beſt be narrow and confined. In the proſecution of this, as of every great deſign, the obſervations of *Solomon* will be found to be wiſe and juſt, that *two are better than one*, that *a threefold cord is not eaſily broken*, and that *in a multitude of counſellors there is ſafety*. In this therefore Chriſtian wiſdom and prudence has directed Chriſtian zeal; and has led Chriſtians to aſſociate themſelves together for the carrying on this great deſign; and to

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this happy meaſure we owe any remarkable ſucceſs it has had in the world. Societies have been erected for propagating Chriſtian knowledge; by contributing to the ſupport of which, the great and wealthy have had a noble opportunity of honouring God with their ſubſtance: and thoſe of meaner circumſtances, by offering their mite, have had the occaſion of expreſſing their zeal for his ſervice: ſocieties, where the joint liberality of numbers has produced a fund, in ſome meaſure proportioned to ſo great a deſign; and their united counſels have been employed in laying it out to the beſt and wiſeſt purpoſes. And bleſſed be God, that we of this country, poor and indigent as we may be, when compared with others, have not been wanting in this excellent charity; that we too have a *Society for propagating Chriſtian knowledge*, a conſpicuous, and, I hope, a laſting monument of public ſpirit and of Chriſtian zeal.

THIS

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THIS *Society* founded by royal authority, cheriſhed by royal favour, maintained and ſupported by liberal donations of many noble and worthy perſons,---happy in a wiſe and faithful adminiſtration, has extended her cares to the habitations of cruelty and barbarity, and has not, without ſucceſs, ſent the glad tidings of ſalvation to the dark corners of the earth. That more has not been done for them that are without, has been owing to this melancholy circumſtance, that after we have for many ages enjoyed the Goſpel, and for ſome time have been bleſſed with the pureſt diſpenſation of it, there have ſtill been in our own borders ſuch remains of heathen darkneſs and popiſh ſuperſtition, as naturally claimed the firſt attention and care, and have reminded the *Society* that charity muſt begin at home. But after the world has been favoured with ſo many and diſtinct accounts of the excellent conſtitution, the wiſe regulations, the extenſive cares and unwearied labours of this

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*Society*, it were ſuperfluous to enter into any particular detail.

ALLOW me only to obſerve, as what muſt afford us no mean idea of the uſefulneſs of this deſign, and at the ſame time may give us comfortable hopes, that this zeal, in ſo good a work, muſt be attended with great and important ſucceſs; allow me, I ſay, to obſerve, that beſides the miniſters and preachers employed in the *Highlands* and *Iſlands*, and maintained on this fund, and that other which is juſtly diſtinguiſhed by the name of the *Royal Bounty*, the *Society*, at this preſent time, ſupports in theſe parts no leſs than one hundred and thirty one ſchools, where upwards of ſeven thouſand poor children are inſtructed, who, moſt of them, without this charitable proviſion, muſt have grown up in the moſt wretched barbarity and ignorance.

BUT why need we go to ſuch remote corners

corners for inſtances of the *Society's* care and concern to promote this great end of their inſtitution, when this very aſſembly affords us a moſt conſpicuous and convincing proof of it. Long had the condition of the poor of this populous city been matter of grief and regret to every wiſe and good man; when miſerable in themſelves, and uneaſy to all around them, they paſſed their uncomfortable lives in beggary, and in idleneſs, vice and ignorance, its almoſt conſtant attendants, and brought up their unhappy children to inherit the ſame miſery and wretchedneſs. At length the noble plan was laid, which now, by the good hand of God, is ſo far advanced, and ſo well eſtabliſhed, for feeding our hungry, for clothing our naked, for bringing them that were caſt out into houſes. And that this charity might not be confined to the relieving the miſeries of this preſent life, the *Society* chearfully embraces this opportunity of promoting Chriſtian knowledge, and kindly lends her helpful

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helpful hand for the inſtruction of thoſe grown up in ignorance, and for the early education of the poor children, to whom their parents were unable or unwilling to afford this bleſſing, or who had been caſt upon the world in a helpleſs orphan ſtate. What have been the happy effects of this wiſe and good appointment, there are not a few preſent who can bear witneſs. I ſhall only venture to affirm, that the proficiency of theſe poor children in the moſt valuable and uſeful knowledge, the knowledge of God, and of the principles of our holy religion, will be found to be fully equal to them who have their education in the polite expenſive manner, which is now too much in faſhion amongſt us.

I MUST not, I need not ſurely detain this audience, after having ſo far encroached on their patience, with any addreſs to you the honourable, reverend, and worthy members of this *Society*.---You know your duty, and the importance of the deſign in which

which you are engaged. You daily feel the inward pleaſure that attends the zealous proſecution of it. You know to whom you muſt look, on whom you muſt depend for the happy iſſue of all your labours, and from whom alone you muſt expect your reward. May God encourage your hearts, and ſtrengthen your hands in this great and excellent work. And may he ſtill more diſpoſe the minds of thoſe to whom he has given wealth and riches, to enlarge your power of doing good. And, by his bleſſing on the laudable endeavours of this, and ſuch other Chriſtian ſocieties, may the knowledge of the Lord at length *cover the earth, as the waters do the ſea.*

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# SERMON VIII.

## The Love of GOD to Mankind, in their Redemption through JESUS CHRIST.

1 JOHN iv. 9.

*In this was manifeſted the love of God towards us, becauſe that God ſent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.*

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GREAT and manifold are the advantages that attend a ſerious and devout contemplation of the divine benignity and goodneſs. By the conſtitution of our being we neceſſarily receive delight from the perception of every thing that is beautiful and excellent. In the material world we are ſurrounded with a variety of objects, which ſtriking our ſenſes yield us this pleaſure. But there are beauties of

of another and a higher nature, which immediately touch the ſoul, and afford us a ſatisfaction more exalted and ſublime. Moral excellence and goodneſs, weak and imperfect as they are found to be in our fellow-creatures, have the moſt powerful charms to attract our minds. How raviſhing then muſt be the contemplation of the ſpring, the ſource of this perfection? how delightful the ſtudy of infinite goodneſs and unbounded love? But the pleaſure it affords is not the only motive to this divine employment; it will compoſe our minds, and quell every gloomy and diſturbing paſſion; it will inſpire us with hope in the midſt of dangers, and arm us with patience, contentment and fortitude, under all the diſaſters of life. It will naturally diſpoſe our minds to the love of God, and the other duties of religion, which elevate the ſoul, and raiſe our natures to their greateſt dignity and perfection. And beſides, as it is the natural tribute which as intelligent creatures we owe to

God,

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God, and which he requires in return for the bleſſings we enjoy; ſo by rendering it, we ſecure the poſſeſſion of theſe bleſſings, and are qualified for receiving higher communications of his favour and love. Now for this moſt agreeable and uſeful exerciſe, we have abundant matter preſented to us in all the works of God. That noble variety of creatures ſo wonderfully framed, and ſo wiſely ordered, brightly diſplays the goodneſs of him who made the heaven and the earth, and every living thing. The honourable rank in which we ourſelves are placed in the creation of God, the admirable fabric of our bodies, the aſtoniſhing faculties of the ſoul, the plenteous proviſion that is made for the ſupport and joy of our lives, call for the grateful return of our adoration and praiſe, and ſhould ſtir us up with our ſouls, and all that is within us, to bleſs that God, who is the *fountain of life*, from whom *cometh down every good and every perfect gift*.

BUT if we desire to have a scene of contemplation opened up, that is still more glorious; to behold goodness in all its beauty, and the love of God displayed in its most powerful and alluring charms; let us turn our thoughts upon the redemption of guilty degenerate mankind, from misery and death, to happiness and immortal life. Altho' the earth, is no doubt, *full of the goodness of the Lord*, and tho' every thing in or about us may afford us proofs of the kindness of our great Creator; yet sin, that destructive subtile poison, has, beyond all question, spread its direful influence over all things here below; it has in some measure deformed the face of nature, and rendered our views of the divine goodness broken and imperfect; so that now we behold a mixed and clouded scene. Here we may see the divine goodness clearly displayed; but there it is hid under inexplicable difficulties. Here the scene is pleasant and delightful; there it is dark and gloomy. Here ought

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to be acknowledged the bleſſings of a merciful father; there may be ſeen the judgments of an incenſed God. But if we turn our thoughts to the love of God in Jeſus Chriſt, we ſhall find goodneſs pure and unmixed, bright and dazling. Here are no clouds to interrupt our views, nothing to raiſe doubts and perplexing fears in our breaſts, nothing to limit the flight of our ſouls, but the boundleſs greatneſs of the object.

AND as we have here the moſt illuſtrious diſplay of goodneſs and love, ſo the peculiar concern we have in it, ſhould juſtly make it the darling ſubject of our contemplation. Creating and preſerving goodneſs is diffuſed over the whole univerſe, and the bleſſings which thence flow to us, we have in common with many of the works of God. Life is enjoyed by the whole animal creation; reaſon, underſtanding and wiſdom we poſſeſs in a lower degree than angels and other intelligent

intelligent beings; vigour and ſtrength of body is common to us with the nobleſt kind of brutes; and that rich ſtore which the earth produces for the ſupport of our lives, the meaneſt worm partakes of as well as man: but redeeming love is exerciſed towards the children of men only. Neither the higher nor the lower part of the creation have any concern in it; it is a myſtery of goodneſs which the angels *deſire to look into*, and chuſe for the ſubject of their celeſtial hymns: how much more ought we, who are the objects of it, and taſte of its bleſſed fruits, to raiſe our ſouls to meditate with joy and gratitude on the marvellous theme, and give *glory to God in the higheſt*, for his *peace on earth, and good-will towards men?* As praiſing God for his wiſdom, power and goodneſs manifeſted in the works of creation and providence, was the proper employment of the antient ſabbath, ſo the celebrating of this more glorious diſcovery of the divine perfections, is the particular duty of our Chriſtian

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Chriſtian ſabbath, which takes its riſe from the finiſhing of our redemption by the reſurrection of Chriſt from the dead. In order to aſſiſt us in ſome meaſure in the performance of this duty, I have choſen the words now read as the ſubject of this diſcourſe.

WE find the apoſtle in the context enforcing the duty of mutual benevolence and affection in the ſtrongeſt manner; *Beloved, let us love one another*, ſays he, ver. 7. *for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God; he that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love*, the ſource, the perfection of love; in order to demonſtrate which he adduces as the moſt convincing proof what we find in the text, *In this was manifeſted the love of God*, &c. My deſign being to repreſent briefly the greatneſs and excellency of the love of God in the redemption of mankind by the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, I am in ſome meaſure directed to the following method

method, by the very words of the text, which may ſuperſede any introductory explication of them. SERM. VIII.

I. IN the firſt place I ſhall endeavour to repreſent the greatneſs of this love from the different characters of God, who has manifeſted it, and of men who are the objects of it, and from the relations ſubſiſting between them.

II. FROM the infinite dignity and perfection of that perſon, by the ſending of whom this love of God was manifeſted; *He ſent his only begotten ſon.*

III. FROM the meanneſs of that ſtate into which he ſent this excellent perſon, and from the ſufferings he underwent in it; which may be both conſidered as included in theſe words, *He ſent his only begotten ſon into the world.*

IV. FROM the noble and generous deſign

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deſign upon which he ſent him, *that we might live through him.*

AFTER which I ſhall conclude with ſome reflexions on the ſubject.

I AM in the firſt place then to ſhow the greatneſs of this love, from the conſideration of the different characters of God and man, and the relations ſubſiſting between them.

HERE indeed, if upon any occaſion, it may be truly ſaid, that *we cannot order our ſpeech by reaſon of darkneſs.---Behold God is great, and we know him not. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us; it is high, we cannot attain to it*; for *he dwelleth in the light, to which no man can approach. Can we by ſearching find him out; can we find out the Almighty unto perfection? To whom will ye liken him, or what likeneſs will ye compare unto him? Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created theſe things, who bringeth out their hoſts by*

*by number, and calleth them all by their names. It is the Lord by whoſe word the heavens were made, and all the hoſt of them by the breath of his mouth; who formed the light and created the darkneſs, whoſe the world is and the fulneſs thereof. He ſitteth on the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as graſhoppers before him; the nations are as the drop in the bucket, and as the ſmall duſt in the balance; they are reputed as nothing before him, they are counted to him leſs than nothing and vanity.* He is *the King immortal, inviſible, whoſe throne remaineth from generation to generation.---But man, whoſe foundation is in the duſt, who dwelleth in houſes of clay, who is but of yeſterday, whoſe breath is in his noſtrils, who is cruſhed before the moth, wherein is he to be accounted of? What is man that the Lord ſhould be mindful of him, or the ſon of man that he ſhould ſet his heart upon him? Man that is a worm, and the ſon of man that is a worm, can he be profitable unto God, or can his goodneſs extend unto him? If his trangreſſions be multi-*

 *plied*

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*plied, what doth he unto him? or if he be righteous, what doth the Lord receive from his hand?* Can his government be weakened by our rebellion? Can his glory be leſſened, or his happineſs impaired? The Lord is infinitely happy in himſelf, and ſtandeth in need of none of his creatures. Was there any beauty, any comelineſs in us, wherefore he ſhould deſire us? No; he is *glorious in holineſs; the Lord, the Holy one, who chargeth his angels with folly; who putteth no truſt in his ſaints; in whoſe ſight the heavens themſelves are not clean; who hath no pleaſure in wickedneſs, and is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.* But *what is man that he ſhould be clean, or he that is born of a woman that he ſhould be righteous? Behold we are ſhapen in iniquity, and in ſin did our mothers conceive us. All fleſh had corrupted their ways upon the earth.* The whole world had become guilty before God. The divine image was defaced; the glory, the honour that once crowned our natures was no more; and we had fallen from the

the reſemblance of angels, to a greater reſemblance of the beaſts of the field; we had rebelled againſt our rightful ſovereign; we had caſt off our beſt friend, and preferred the ſlavery of Satan to the love and favour of God. Whilſt thus guilty, wretched, and vile, was there any juſt ground of hope that we were to receive the higheſt proofs of divine love? Could it ever have been thought, that the eternal Sovereign, on whoſe authority we had trampled, would have interpoſed to preſerve us from periſhing in that deſtruction into which we had plunged ourſelves, or have looked down from the habitation of his holineſs, for any other end, but to render vengeance on his enemies, and to exert his power and his wrath againſt thoſe who had forſaken him? Was it not thus he dealt with thoſe beings of a ſuperior order, whom he ſpared not, but caſt them down to hell, and bound them in chains of everlaſting darkneſs? Yet herein has God manifeſted his goodneſs which *is un-*

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*ſearchable*, and his mercies which are *paſt our finding out*, in extending them to man; to man tho' low and mean in himſelf, tho' polluted and debaſed by ſin.

BUT then, how was it poſſible that this love could ever be manifeſted to the children of men? Was the righteous Sovereign of the world to receive his rebellious ſubjects into favour, without the leaſt ſatisfaction? Was it conſiſtent with his holineſs and juſtice freely to pardon the innumerable inſults offered to his laws? or with his immutable truth to reverſe the ſentence which doomed the tranſgreſſors thereof to deſtruction? Could he thus have maintained the honour of his government? could he thus have ſhown his creatures his love of goodneſs, or deterred them from the practice of ſin? Surely no. How then could the purpoſes of divine love be ever accompliſhed? and whence was the ſatisfaction to come? Who is there in heaven or in earth that is equal to the greatneſs of the

the work? None ſure of the ſons of *Adam*, encompaſſed with weakneſs, and overwhelmed with ſin, could by the moſt direful ſufferings have expiated his own guilt; and could he then by any means have *redeemed his brother*, or *given to God a ranſom for him?* Nay, the whole hoſt of heaven, even the innumerable company of *angels that excel in ſtrength*, with their united force, were unequal for the greatneſs of the task. The ſins of mankind were too heavy a burden for the greateſt created ſtrength to bear, and to atone for them was a work too hard for limited perfection. Whence then could our ſalvation come? This is a queſtion, to determine which, he alone was able, whoſe wiſdom and underſtanding is infinite as his love. He *laid help upon one who was mighty to ſave*. He employed in the work his eternal Son, the Son of his love, whoſe arm alone could bring ſalvation, and raiſe us from guilt and miſery to happineſs and bliſs. And his employing in our behalf a perſon

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ſon of ſuch perfection and dignity is the

2*d* THING, from which appears the greatneſs of this inſtance of the divine goodneſs. *In this was* eminently *manifeſted the love of God towards us, becauſe he ſent his only begotten Son*; his Son whom he loved, *who was the brightneſs of his glory and the expreſs image of his perſon, in whom dwelleth all the fulneſs of the Godhead bodily. He is the firſt and the laſt; the beginning and the ending; who from the beginning was with God, and is God. He is in the Father and the Father in him; and as the Father hath life in himſelf, ſo hath he given to the Son to have life in himſelf alſo. By him were all things created, that are in heaven or that are in earth, viſible or inviſible, whether they be thrones or dominions, principalities or powers, all things were created by him and for him. He upholdeth all things by the word of his power; he is the mighty God, the King of kings and the Lord of Lords.* Had it been poſſible that any of theſe

ſuperior

ſuperior ſpirits that ſurround the throne of God could have executed the purpoſe of his love towards the children of men, it had been goodneſs well deſerving our wonder and praiſe, if the moſt High had parted with any of theſe miniſters of his, that *do his pleaſure and hearken to the voice of his word*, for the ſake of creatures ſo far inferior to them in nature, and contaminated with ſo much guilt. But that he ſhould give his Son, who is *over all bleſſed for ever*, who is infinitely dear to him, and infinitely ſuperior in worth to the whole creation; this is an inſtance of love ſo aſtoniſhing, that human thought and ſpeech are too low, too faint and languid either to conceive or expreſs it.----By this we receive full aſſurance, that the purpoſe of the divine love can never fail, ſince it is put into his hands, who is as perfectly qualified as we can deſire, both in reſpect of power and inclination, to accompliſh the great deſign. Can there be any thing too arduous and difficult for him,

to

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to whom *all power is committed in heaven and in earth; who is able to ſubdue all things to himſelf?* Can our intereſts ever ſuffer in his hands, *in whom are hid all the treaſures of wiſdom and knowledge; whoſe faithfulneſs is unto all generations*, and *whoſe loving kindneſs endureth for ever?* But the great excellency of this love will appear more fully, if we conſider,

IN the 3*d* place, The meanneſs of that ſtate, and the dreadfulneſs of thoſe ſufferings into which God ſent his only begotten Son. Were the children of men to be redeemed by the Son of God, by a perſon thus infinite in all perfection; and might not he, who ſpoke into being the heavens and the earth, by the ſame powerful word have reſcued mankind from the loweſt miſery? Muſt he leave his throne of majeſty and glory, and appear on earth? He, whoſe power is ſubject to no reſtraint, whoſe word can accompliſh that which he pleaſeth. Or might he

he not at leaſt have appeared in ſome viſible glory, as when he wrought ſalvation to his antient people, and gave them laws from mount *Sinai?* No: He who *was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal to God,* muſt *become of no reputation, muſt be found in faſhion as a man, and be made in the likeneſs of ſinful fleſh.* Here is a myſtery which will for ever employ the thought and ſtudy of the moſt exalted Seraphs, and be a ſubject of the higheſt admiration throughout all the ages of eternity. That he, who is God, *the king immortal and inviſible,* ſhould be born of a woman; ſhould ſubmit to the weakneſs of infancy, the infirmities of childhood, and by ſlow and gradual ſteps arrive at the ſtrength and juſt proportion of manhood; that he, who was the great Governor of all things, ſhould become ſubject to earthly parents; that he who commanded the world into being, ſhould, for the ſatisfying of his hunger, and the ſuſtenance of his life, depend on thoſe very

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very creatures which his fingers had framed; that he, in whoſe *preſence is an eternal fulneſs of joy, at whoſe right hand are pleaſures for evermore*, ſhould become ſubject to all the labours and ſorrows of men.-----Theſe are ſubjects of contemplation which the mind of man is neither able to fathom nor exhauſt; and all we can do, is, humbly to adore what we cannot comprehend.

BUT was the Son of God to deſcend ſo low as to vail his glory in human fleſh, and to tabernacle among men? Might he not have appeared at leaſt with the pomp and magnificence of a mighty ſovereign, with all that grandeur and majeſty which attracts the reverence of men, and ſeems to exalt humanity ſomewhat above itſelf? No: His firſt appearance was attended with all the circumſtances of diſgrace and obſcurity; from his cradle to his grave there is one melancholy ſcene of poverty and oppreſſion, diſhonour and pain. He

was

was brought forth in a ſtable, and laid in a manger. Soon are the wretched parents forced to fly, from the hands of a cruel tyrant, with their helpleſs infant, into lonely exile. When he grew up, he was *a man of ſorrows and acquainted with grief:* He wandred about from place to place, and *had not where to lay his head.* By ſome he was reproached as a ſower of ſedition, by others reviled as an impoſtor; by ſome he was accuſed as a blaſphemer, by others as a ſorcerer and a devil. Thro' his whole life he *endured the contradiction of ſinners againſt himſelf.* But if we follow him to the laſt ſcene, and trace him thro' his ſufferings and death, things yet more wonderful will open to our view. There we ſee him in his ſorrowful retirement; his immaculate ſoul overwhelmed with that wrath that was due to us, and his body in agony ineffable, *ſweating great drops of blood.* There we ſee him betrayed into the hands of his enemies by the treachery of one friend, curſed and denied by another,

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another, and baſely left and deſerted by all. There we ſee him dragged to the judgment hall, buffeted, whipt and ſpit upon; by the moſt groſs injuſtice condemned to an ignominious death, dreſt up as an object of cruel deriſion, and his ſacred head wounded with a crown of thorns. He is led out to *Calvary*, nailed to the accurſed tree, the blood ſpringing from his hands and feet, and amidſt the ſcoffs and inſults of his triumphing perſecutors and enemies, he reclines his head, pours out his ſoul and gives up the ghoſt.-----Here, my brethren, may we not juſtly apply the words of *Moſes*, to expreſs our admiration; *Aſk now of the days that are paſt, which were before thee, ſince the day that God created man upon the earth, and aſk from the one ſide of heaven unto the other, whether there has been any ſuch thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it* ‡. Well might the ſun hide his glorious head in darkneſs, when he, who appointed the ordinances

‡ Deut. iv. 32.

of

of heaven, was expiring on a croſs. Well might univerſal horror and confuſion overſpread the face of nature at the death of him, at whoſe voice the *earth ſhakes* and trembles, and *the foundations of the hills are moved.* Did creatures inanimate and lifeleſs thus acknowledge their dying Lord, and can we, who are ſo nearly concerned in the matter, ever turn our thoughts to the wondrous theme, but with hearts filled with thankfulneſs, adoration and praiſe? *O the heighth and the depth, the breadth and the length of the love of God in Chriſt Jeſus, which paſſeth knowledge!*

THE laſt thing, from which I propoſed to ſhow the greatneſs of this love, was the generous and noble deſign on which God ſent his only begotten Son into the world, which in the text is expreſt in theſe words, *that we might live by him*; and this your time allows me but juſt to touch at.

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As the wretched condition, into which man had brought himſelf by his departure from God, is repreſented to us in ſcripture by the ſtrongeſt figures and images; ſo it is beautiful to obſerve, how by figures directly contrary to theſe, are expreſſed the bleſſed effects of the love of God in Jeſus Chriſt. By our *wicked works* we were *at enmity with God, alienated from him*, engaged in rebellion againſt our rightful Sovereign, and expoſed to his wrath: but Jeſus Chriſt *having made peace by the blood of his croſs, hath reconciled us unto God.* We were *ſitting in darkneſs*, and *in the ſhadow of death:* but Jeſus Chriſt hath brought us from *darkneſs into his marvelous light.* We were under the ſlavery of ſin, and the power and dominion of Satan; but by Jeſus Chriſt we are called unto liberty, even *the glorious liberty of the ſons of God.* But there is no figure more expreſſive than that which is uſed in the text. *Life* is the greateſt of all bleſſings, the neceſſary foundation of all others, without which we can

can enjoy nothing. As all other bleſſings neceſſarily preſuppoſe this, ſo by an ordinary figure, life is put not only for the continuation of our being, but for all thoſe good things that raiſe our natures to their greateſt perfection and happineſs. And ſuch a connexion is there between the ideas of life, perfection and happineſs, that when a being has loſt the perfection of its nature, and conſequently its happineſs, it is in the ſcripture ſtile ſaid to be *dead*. Thus men, when ſunk in corruption, and enſlaved to filthy luſts and diſorderly paſſions, which weaken all their powers and faculties, are ſaid to be *dead*; and that future miſery, which is the conſequence of this ſin and corruption, is named *death*, and *eternal death*. Now, with relation to theſe two kinds of death, the Son of God was ſent to purchaſe for us a twofold life. We were *dead in treſpaſſes and ſins*; he was ſent to *create us again unto good works*, to breathe into our ſouls a new and divine life of holineſs and goodneſs, and to *bleſs*

*every*

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*every one of us, by turning us from our iniquities.* We were bound over to the *ſecond death*, the death of eternal miſery; he was ſent to reſtore us to *immortal life*. He came *that we might have life*, and *that we might have it more abundantly*. *The gift of God is eternal life through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord*. And what tongue can deſcribe the greatneſs of this gift? Words fail us, nay thought itſelf is overpower'd, when we attempt to riſe to ſo high a theme. Great was the bleſſing to be called from nothing unto being and life; greater ſtill, to have that life and being ſo long continued, and enriched with ſo many comforts. But to have that life continued for evermore, in the midſt of angels and ſaints, and in the immediate preſence of God; freed from every annoyance and diſtreſs, ſurrounded with every joy, raiſed to the very higheſt perfection of our nature; this is ſuch a bleſſing, as no tongue can expreſs, and no heart be ſufficiently grateful for. All that we can ſay upon this ſubject is, that *eye hath*

*hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.* And can we, my brethren, on the one hand, reflect on that direful anguiſh and endleſs miſery, which was the juſt demerit of our ſins; can we, on the other hand, raiſe our thoughts to this celeſtial bliſs, and ſhall not our minds overflow with joy and gratitude for that love which God has manifeſted in ſending his *only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him?*

THUS have I endeavoured to ſhow the greatneſs of this love, from the conſiderations occurring in the text. I now go on to make ſome practical improvement of the ſubject.

*1ſt,* DOES not this marvelous inſtance of goodneſs lay us under the ſtrongeſt obligations, to live in the exerciſe of love, and chearful obedience to God our Bene-

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factor and Redeemer? He is poſſeſt of every amiable perfection, and thus has a natural title to the love of every intelligent mind. He is our Creator and Preſerver, and thus has an undoubted right to our obedience. He has connected our happineſs with our loving him, and appointed eternal miſery as the portion of all that forſake him; and thus our intereſt, as well as our duty, is concerned in the matter.

BUT if none of theſe motives, ſtrong and weighty as they are, make a ſufficient impreſſion upon us, here ſure is an argument, which, if we have the leaſt ingenuity of ſpirit, muſt gain powerfully upon our minds. God loved us while we were yet *enemies to him by reaſon of wicked works*; he loved us when we deſerved nothing but his wrath and indignation to be revealed from heaven againſt us; loved us in a manner too ſurpriſing for us to conceive or expreſs: and ſhall we not *love him*,

*him, who firſt loved us?* Well may the thought of his ſtupenduous goodneſs melt the hardeſt heart, and make the moſt abandoned ſinner bluſh at his ingratitude? Shall the great Majeſty of heaven and earth ſtrive as it were to gain by mercy and kindneſs thoſe creatures, whom in juſtice he might have doomed to everlaſting miſery? and ſhall we trample on his condeſcenſion, and reject with ſcorn his offers of love? Shall we deſpiſe the friendſhip of that God, who, to reconcile us to himſelf, parted with his eternal Son? Or ſhall we offend that Saviour who has loved us to the death? *Do we thus requite the Lord? O fooliſh people and unwiſe!* Ought not his love to kindle in our breaſts a mutual flame? to perſuade us to obey him with chearful and willing minds, and *conſtrain us* henceforth *not to live unto ourſelves, but unto him that died for us and roſe again?*

BUT further, 2*dly*, This inſtance of the divine goodneſs may be improven as an argument to perſuade and engage us to

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truſt and rely on God for every bleſſing we ſtand in need of, becauſe his children and ſervants may hence be aſſured that he will order every thing for their advantage and benefit. Thus reaſons the apoſtle, *If God ſpared not his own ſon, but delivered him up for us all, how ſhall he not with him alſo freely give us all things?* Shall we henceforth allow any doubt of the divine goodneſs to lurk in our breaſts, or the leaſt diſtruſt of his fatherly tenderneſs to diſturb the peace of our minds? Shall we dare to entertain diſhonourable thoughts of the divine government as harſh and ſevere, after ſo aſtoniſhing an inſtance of of his kindneſs, mercy and love? If the enjoyments of this life are not beſtowed upon us ſo liberally as upon others, let us not murmur nor repine, as if we were forgotten by God; but reſting, with holy confidence, on this ſignal proof and demonſtration of the divine goodneſs, let us be convinced that our merciful father, by a ſparing communication of theſe things,

is

is promoting our greateſt good. Nay, tho' we are viſited with diſtreſs and affliction, yet we may rejoice in our tribulations, aſſured that they will work for our good, if by our own miſmanagement we prevent not the wholeſome medicines having their deſigned effect. We ought to be convinced that God loves us more than we love ourſelves, and cares for us more than we care for ourſelves: and inſtead of giving way to anxious ſolicitude about *what we ſhall eat, what we ſhall drink, and wherewithal we ſhall be cloathed*, let us *ſeek firſt the kingdom of God*, confiding in him, that *all other things ſhall be added unto us*. Yea, tho' the *fig-tree ſhould not bloſſom and there ſhould be no fruit in the vine, tho' the labour of the olive ſhould fail and the field ſhould yield no meat, tho' the flock be cut off from the fold and there ſhould be no herd in the ſtall*, yet let us ſtill *rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of our ſalvation.*

3*dly*, LET us take notice of the improvement

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provement our apoſtle makes of this doctrine in the context. *Beloved*, ſays he, *if God ſo loved us, we ought alſo to love one another*. We are under the ſtricteſt obligation to imitate the Deity in his moral perfections. This is a natural conſequence of true love to God, and a neceſſary condition of God's love to and approbation of us. Of all the divine perfections, goodneſs is the moſt amiable in itſelf, and the moſt fit and proper for our imitation; and of all the inſtances of the divine goodneſs, that which he has manifeſted in Jeſus Chriſt is the moſt ſhining and glorious. There we are taught of God in a ſpecial manner how we ought to love one another; and by this clearer manifeſtation of goodneſs, we are laid under ſtronger obligations of copying after it, in kindneſs and benevolence to our fellow creatures. Shall the Lord, the poſſeſſor of heaven and earth, ſhow his love to us, on whom he was altogether independent, and ſhall not we love thoſe, upon whom we daily depend

depend for their mutual good offices, without whom we could ſcarce preſerve our very beings? Has the Lord, who is of untainted holineſs and infinite mercy, manifeſted ſuch goodneſs to us, when we were abominable and polluted in his ſight, and ſhall we henceforth dare to think the loweſt of our fellow creatures unworthy of our love, and look down with diſdain on the poor and the indigent? Has God loved us, while we were enemies, and ſhall the little petty offences of our neighbours fire our minds with hatred and revenge? No: Let us be *followers of God as dear children, putting on bowels of mercy, compaſſion and loving kindneſs*, and above all things, *put on charity, which is the bond of perfectneſs*. One great deſign of this diſpenſation of love was to promote peace, friendſhip and benevolence among mankind, and to root out of our natures thoſe angry hurtful paſſions, which blaſt the pleaſures of ſociety. By this diſpenſation Chriſtians are joined together by the bond



of

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of a moſt ſacred ſociety and union. They are all the ſervants of one maſter, who has left it as his peculiar command, and the teſt of their fidelity to him, that they love one another; they are all brethren ſprung from the ſame *incorruptible ſeed*, and therefore ought they to love as brethren. They are all members of the ſame body, whereof Jeſus Chriſt is the head, and this body God hath ſo tempered together, that there ſhould be no ſchiſm in it, but that the members ſhould have the ſame care one for another; and that *whether one member ſuffer, all the members ſhould ſuffer with it; or whether one member rejoice, all the members ſhould rejoice with it.*

BUT *laſtly*, If God has ſent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him, and thus provided for our happineſs in a manner ſo wonderful and expenſive, let us all conſider how inexcuſable we ſhall be, if we be found

found neglecters of the offered ſalvation. SERM. VIII. *See that ye refuſe not him that ſpeaketh; for if they eſcaped not, who refuſed him that ſpake on earth, much more ſhall not we eſcape if we turn away from him that ſpeaketh from heaven. If the word ſpoken by angels was ſtedfaſt, and every tranſgeſſion and diſobedience received a juſt recompence of reward, how ſhall we eſcape if we neglect ſo great ſalvation? He that deſpiſed Moſes's law died without mercy; but of how much ſorer puniſhment, ſuppoſe ye, ſhall he be thought worthy, who hath troden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing? If we ſin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more ſacrifice for ſin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. Let us therefore fear, leſt a promiſe being left of entering into his reſt, any of us ſhould ſeem to come ſhort of it. Take heed brethren, leſt there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.* And, *let us exhort one another daily*

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*daily while it is called to day, leſt any of us be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin*; and thus *receive the grace of God in vain. May the God of all grace who hath called us unto his eternal glory through Jeſus Chriſt, perfect, ſtabliſh, ſtrengthen, ſettle us.* To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. *Amen.*

SER-

# SERMON IX.

## The Obligation to BROTHERLY LOVE, deduced from the Love of GOD to us.

1 JOHN iv. 11.

*Beloved, if God ſo loved us, we ought alſo to love one another.*

LOVE to our neighbour is a duty of natural religion, the reaſonableneſs of which can be deduced from the moſt evident principles. Its tendency to promote our own happineſs, and the peace and good order of ſociety; its agreeableneſs to our natures, and to thoſe affections our Maker has endued us with, abundantly prove it to be both our duty and our intereſt. As divine revelation enforces in the ſtrongeſt manner all the duties of natural religion, and propoſes the beſt arguments

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guments to incite us to the performance of them, ſo there is no duty that we are therein more frequently, and by a greater variety of motives exhorted to, than this of mutual love. This our Saviour makes the diſtinguiſhing mark of his diſciples. This his apoſtles inſiſt on in a particular manner as the *royal law*, the *bond of perfection*, the *ſum of the whole law*, and the *end of the commandment*. This they eſtabliſh as the beſt mark of ſincerity in religion. *Hereby we know*, ſays *John*, *that we have paſſed from death to life, becauſe we love the brethren.*

AMONG the arguments to enforce this duty, there is none uſed more frequently, than that of God's love to mankind; which I ſhall endeavour to illuſtrate from the words of the text; where we have the apoſtle's concluſion from what he had advanced in the four preceeding verſes; *Beloved, let us love one another*, (ver. 7.) *For love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not,*

*not, knoweth not God; for God is love*, is the ſource and perfection of love. In proof of this, he adduces the moſt ſurpriſing inſtance of divine love. *In this was manifeſted the love of God towards us, becauſe that God ſent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and ſent his Son to be a propitiation for our ſins. Beloved, if God ſo loved us, we ought alſo to love one another.* From the connexion of theſe words with what goes before, it is plain, that the love of God to us, of which the apoſtle here ſpeaks, is to be underſtood of his love manifeſted in Jeſus Chriſt; and the apoſtle's argument in ſhort is this, that by this ſurpriſing inſtance of the divine love, we are laid under more particular and ſtrong obligations to love our neighbour, than the reſt of mankind, who are ignorant of this amazing mercy and goodneſs of God.

THE apoſtle on this occaſion uſes a very

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very endearing appellation, extremely well adapted to the ſubject he is treating of; when exhorting them to love, he addreſſes them by a title, which declares he had the ſame tender affection for them all, which he deſired them to have for one another. *Beloved, if God ſo loved us*, &c. Tho' the apoſtle, as was juſt now hinted, has here no doubt chiefly in his eye the inſtance of God's love in Jeſus Chriſt; yet I hope, it will not be thought doing great violence to the words of the apoſtle, and none ſure to his reaſoning, if I extend it ſo far as to comprehend all the goodneſs and love God our merciful Father has ſhown to the children of men. I need ſcarce tell you, that by love to one another, we are to underſtand ſuch an eſteem, regard and affection for our fellow-creatures, as will effectually move us, on every occaſion, to promote their happineſs, and to do them all the good offices that we poſſibly can.

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In diſcourſing farther from theſe words, I ſhall endeavour, *firſt*, To ſhow in general, how God's love to mankind is a motive and argument for our loving one another: and,

*Secondly*, Show what particular obligations the love of God in Jeſus Chriſt lays upon Chriſtians to love their brethren.

As to the *firſt*, God's love to mankind is an argument for our loving one another, in theſe two reſpects,

I. As it ſets before us a pattern and example that we are bound to copy after; and,

II. As it lays upon us the greateſt obligations, in gratitude, to the performance of this duty.

I. It is an obſervation as true as it is common, that men are moved by example

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ample more than by precept. We naturally incline to imitate thoſe we eſteem, and ambitiouſly aſpire to be like thoſe above us. This principle of emulation has given birth to the greateſt and moſt noble actions. In the preſent ſtate of things indeed, where greatneſs and wiſdom are not always joined, and men of the moſt exalted ſtations are not always adorned with the moſt refined virtues, we are frequently led by it into the moſt ridiculous follies, and often into the moſt ſhameful vices. But this only ſhows, how powerfully it works in our ſouls, and that like the other paſſions it will prove miſchievous, when miſapplied and exerted upon wrong objects. Of itſelf it is a noble beneficial principle, planted in us by our wiſe Creator, to incite us to the purſuit of whatever is great, good, or excellent: And as he is himſelf the Architype of all perfection, the ſource and fountain of every beauty and virtue to be found in the creature, its great deſign was to raiſe our ſouls to the imitation

imitation of him, that by forming our lives after his bleſſed example, we might become as like to him, as finite beings can approach in likeneſs to one who is infinite.

Now that all rational creatures are under the ſtricteſt obligations to imitate the Deity, and regulate their lives after his example, requires no long deduction of argument to prove.---By the fundamental law of our beings we are bound to purſue our own happineſs: our happineſs lyes in the perfection of our natures; the perfection of our natures lyes in their reſemblance to the ſupreme perfection. This therefore muſt be ſet before us as our rule and pattern, if we would attain to that perfection in which conſiſts our happineſs. Man was originally form'd after the image of God; it was the honour and dignity of our natures to bear ſome ſimilitude to the Deity. In the brightneſs of this image conſiſted the happineſs of man in his prim-

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eval innocent ſtate: from its being defaced and darkened flows all our miſery and woe. Would we then have our natures reſtored to their primitive honour and happineſs, this image muſt be renewed in its former beauty and luſtre. Of ſuch importance is this, that the whole of religion is ſometimes repreſented as conſiſting in the imitation of the Deity. This ſublime notion of religion even the more enlightened heathens ſeem to have had, when they tell us, that the beſt way of worſhipping and ſerving God is to imitate and endeavour to reſemble him. This likeways is very agreeable to what we are taught in the word of God, where our duty is ſumm'd up in theſe general precepts, of being *holy as God is holy, perfect as he is perfect, and merciful as our Father in heaven is merciful*; and where we are called to *be followers of God as dear children*. Of the divine perfections there are ſome, in which it is abſolutely impoſſible for us to imitate or reſemble him in the ſmalleſt

ſmalleſt degree; in which it would be impious and abſurd to attempt any likeneſs to Almighty God the Supreme Being; ſuch are the immenſity, eternity, and the other natural perfections of the Deity. When therefore we are called to the imitation of God, it can only be underſtood of his moral perfections, his holineſs, his faithfulneſs, his righteouſneſs, and above all his goodneſs and mercy, which is now particularly the ſubject of our conſideration: for all the love that God has manifeſted to the children of men, flows from this, the moſt amiable perfection of his nature, which ſheds a beauty and luſtre on his other excellencies, and makes him in a peculiar manner the object of the love and adoration of his creatures.

To enumerate the various inſtances of the divine goodneſs, as it is manifeſted in the works of creation, of providence and redemption, and thus to ſet the divine example of love in its proper light, is a work

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that I dare not undertake. The ſubject is vaſt and extenſive: for where can we turn our eyes on the works of God, or on his diſpenſations to mankind, where we ſhall not ſee the moſt conſpicuous marks of his kindneſs, benignity and love? The moſt exalted angel cannot comprehend the whole; but he muſt be below a man, who ſees not enough to raiſe his wonder and adoration. *The whole earth is full of the goodneſs of the Lord*; he has ſpread it over all his works. This gave birth to the whole creation, and adorn'd it with ſuch beauty and magnificence: this preſerves and upholds the world in its harmonious order: this gave life and breath to every living thing: this form'd our bodies in ſo wonderful a manner, and breathed into us immortal ſouls: this hath *holden us up from the womb*; hath *given us bread to eat and raiment to put on*, and *made us to dwell in ſafety, preſerving our going out and our coming in.* This *giveth us rain from heaven and fruitful ſeaſons*, and *filleth our hearts with*

*with food and gladneſs.* This delivereth the poor when they cry, and is the helper of them that have no help of man: this is a *Father to the fatherleſs*, a *Judge of the widow*, and the *orphans ſtay in time of need.*

BUT how much more ſurpriſing is the ſcene that opens, if we turn our eyes to the diſpenſation of the divine love and goodneſs in Jeſus Chriſt? If we view, on the one hand, the children of men ſunk in ſin, buried in corruption, haſtening with a fatal thoughtleſneſs to endleſs miſery and woe: and, on the other hand, ſee the bowels of the divine love and compaſſion move towards them, ſending the eternal Son of God to undergo a courſe of miſery in our nature, to paſs his life in contempt and poverty, and to end it by a cruel ignominious death, that he might heal the diſeaſes of our ſinful natures, redeem us from the power of Satan, hell, and death, and reſtore us to immortal life? Here our minds are loſt. This love is too great,

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great, too wonderful for us to comprehend: and well may we join in the apoſtle's exclamation, *O! the height, the depth, the breadth and the length of the love of God in Chriſt Jeſus, that paſſeth knowledge.*

THIS is a faint, imperfect view of the example of love God ſets before us; upon the review of which, I am ſenſible, this thought will naturally ariſe in our minds: What? can weak corrupted man arrive at the leaſt reſemblance to ſuch divine excellence? Is it not in vain to propoſe a ſtandard to ourſelves to which we can never riſe?----The imperfection indeed of our natures makes it impoſſible that this virtue ſhould be in our minds, either in that boundleſs height, or in that unmixed purity that it is in God. But ſome ſeeds of goodneſs there are in our natures, which it is our duty to improve: no more is required of us, than it is poſſible for us to perform; and when we have done our beſt, we have done our duty. We all move

move in a very narrow ſphere, and 'tis but a ſmall part, even of our own ſpecies, we can benefit by our love. Our various ſtations in the world with reſpect to riches, power and authority, make a difference as to our capacity of exerting this virtue, and conſequently as to the meaſures of it which are required of us. This, however, is certain, that every man without exception may have a concern and affection for his fellow-creatures, may wiſh and deſire their welfare, and carefully avoid any thing that may diſturb or hinder it: this is in every man's power, however ſtraiten'd and indigent his fortune be; and, if a man be really ſo ſituated in the world, that he cannot poſſibly expreſs this affection by acts of beneficence, the ſincerity of the affection will no doubt be accepted by God; in whoſe eye the humble poor man may be found to have as true and generous a love to mankind, as the moſt beneficent prince.

BUT,

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BUT, if we conſider the great extent of this duty, and the innumerable ways in which one man may do good to another, we ſhall find it ſcarce imaginable, that any man (living in ſociety at leaſt) ſhould be placed in ſuch circumſtances, that he may not have it frequently in his power to expreſs his love, by actions that are really uſeful and beneficial to his neighbour. Were our breaſts warmed as they ought to be with this generous affection, we would find, that in every ſtation of life, our real beneficence might reach vaſtly farther than we are apt to imagine. How much good might even thoſe of the loweſt rank find within their power? How many of their fellow-creatures are there to whom they might be uſeful, by advice, inſtruction, reproof, maintaining their good name, and many other important offices of kindneſs, to the performance of which the advantages of riches or power are not required? All this, and much more, is within the reach of thoſe of a middle

middle ſtation in life. The duties and good offices juſt now named may, by them, be performed with greater ſucceſs, and to a greater extent; and beſides theſe, an actual relief of the poor and diſtreſſed is required of them. For the firſt ſtep a man advances from poverty himſelf, he is obliged to look back and give his aſſiſtance to thoſe he has left behind him. But what a ſpacious field opens to ſuch as are exalted above others in riches and power? Here lyes the true dignity and grandeur of their ſuperior rank; in this conſiſts their chief honour and happineſs, that they have it for their privilege to bleſs vaſt numbers of their fellow-creatures, and to make perhaps a whole people happy. For this ſuperior advantage would a truly virtuous man covet large poſſeſſions, and be ambitious of power; and for nothing elſe would he aſpire at a ſtation expoſed to ſo numerous temptations and diſaſters.



In the character of that good and great man

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man *Job*, we have a ſhining inſtance, how far a man of ſuperior ſtation and opulent fortune may render himſelf a public bleſſing; and at the ſame time, 'tis obſervable, that he ſeems particularly afflicted with his indigent ſtate, when he remembers the pleaſure he formerly had in relieving the diſtreſſed and miſerable. *Oh! that I were as in months paſt*, ſays he in the beginning of his lamentation, (chap. xxix.) *as in the days when God preſerved me, when I waſhed my ſteps in butter, and the rock poured me out rivers of oil: when the ear heard me, then it bleſſed me, and when the eye ſaw me, it gave witneſs to me; becauſe I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherleſs, and him that had none to help him: the bleſſing of him that was ready to periſh came upon me, and I cauſed the widow's heart to ſing for joy. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame; I was a father to the poor, and the cauſe which I knew not, I ſearched out. Did I not weep for him that was in trouble? Was not my ſoul grieved for the poor? his loins bleſſed*

*bleſſed me, and he was warmed with the fleece of my flock.* SERM. IX.

THIS is the moſt divine and glorious character man can be adorned with, to be as if he were God's ſubſtitute on earth, relieving the calamities of men, and ſpreading joy and gladneſs all around him, receiving the bleſſings of them he has delivered from miſery, and the praiſe of every good and virtuous ſoul. This is the pattern that God has ſet before us, and theſe are the meaſures in which it is poſſible for us to imitate him, in our different ſituations in the world.

EVEN ſuppoſing we were not under any ſtrict obligation to imitate the divine example, and that it had not, as it really has, the nature of a command upon us, there are ſome circumſtances in the example itſelf moſt worthy to be attended to, which ought to have a peculiar force to recommend to us the performance of this duty of mutual love.

IN

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IN the *firſt* place, Almighty God the poſſeſſor of heaven and earth, tho' he be infinitely removed from any want, and incapable of receiving any addition of happineſs or glory from any of his creatures, being all-ſufficient and perfectly happy in himſelf, yet has extended his love in the moſt ſignal manner to us, the race of mortals, who *are as nothing before him, even leſs than nothing, and vanity.* Has this Great God ſhown ſuch kind affection and regard to a rank of beings ſo inconſiderable in his ſight, and ſhall not we love thoſe of the ſame order and ſpecies, the ſame frame and conſtitution with ourſelves, our friends, our brethren? Has the all-ſufficient God exerciſed his goodneſs towards thoſe from whom he cannot receive the leaſt advantage or return, and ſhall not we do good to thoſe on whom we daily depend for their reciprocal good offices? We are weak indigent creatures, not only depending on God for all we enjoy,

joy, but ſtanding in need of the help and aſſiſtance of our fellow-creatures on almoſt every occaſion. What a wretched forlorn thing is man in a ſolitary ſtate? worſe even than the beaſts of the field; ſcarce would he find wherewithal to ſupport a decaying body, or preſerve an uneaſy life amidſt the thouſand dangers that ſurround him.

THAT men are form'd for ſociety, to help and be helped by one another, the circumſtances of their bodies, and the faculties they are endowed with, abundantly declare. That this ſociety cannot be preſerved without a mutual affection between the members thereof, is alſo abundantly plain. If then we had neither the example of God to move us, nor his command to oblige us to this duty, it were our intereſt, and conſequently our duty to practiſe it. But when we have a pattern propoſed to us by the infinitely great God, who can have no ſuch intereſt, no ſuch advan-

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advantage in view, and yet exerciſeth ſuch wonderful love to us, on whom he is altogether independent; ſhould not this excite in every breaſt the like affection to thoſe, on whom ſo great a part of our happineſs depends, from whom we daily receive innumerable advantages, without whom we could ſcarce preſerve our very beings? Should not the example of a beneficence ſo noble and ſo diſintereſted inſpire us with the like virtue, at leaſt, in a caſe where our own intereſt and well-being are ſo deeply concerned? This ſets the reaſoning of the apoſtle in the text in a very ſtrong light, that *if God loved us, us* from whom he had nothing either to hope or fear, *we ought alſo to love one another*, to love our neighbour, on whoſe love to us our happineſs or our miſery ſo much depends. There is another circumſtance in the divine example, which deſerves our conſideration in the

*Second* place. Almighty God is good unto

unto all, even to the moſt undeſerving: *He is kind to the unthankful and to the evil: He makes his ſun to riſe on the evil and on the good; and his rain to deſcend on the juſt and on the unjuſt.* Tho' we daily provoke him and trample on his authority, yet he continues to do us good. The greateſt obſtacle to the prevalence of love and good underſtanding among mankind, ariſes from the ungrateful and injurious returns which too frequently are made us. This cools our affection to our fellow-creatures, and renders us averſe from doing them acts of kindneſs and beneficence. It ſeems a hard command, and ſcarce to be ſubmitted to by fleſh and blood, to perſevere in the exerciſe of love and kindneſs to thoſe who frequently injure us in the moſt ſenſible manner. But did we, my friends, duly conſider the frailty and imperfection of our natures, the heat of our own paſſions, the falſe views which we are apt to entertain of men and things, by which we ourſelves are prone to injure others, and to

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afflict them in as ſenſible a manner as we can be afflicted by them: did we then turn our thoughts on the example of the bleſſed God, who tho' infinitely good to us, tho' *holy in all his ways*, and *righteous in all his works*, and incapable of ever injuring or provoking his creatures, yet is daily provoked by their impiety and rebellion; and notwithſtanding this continues unwearied in doing them good: of what powerful influence ſhould all this be to make us paſs by the petty offences of our fellow-creatures, when they treſpaſs againſt us, at the worſt, in a far leſs hainous manner than we treſpaſs againſt God? Are their offences as numerous as ours are againſt the Divine Majeſty? Dare we ſay, that we were never guilty of the like offences towards them ourſelves? that we were never injurious in our reſentments, nor unjuſt in our ſuſpicions, nor violent in our paſſions, and that in none of our actions we have done to our neighbour what we would be ſorry he

he ſhould do to us? and ſhall it then be matter of ſuch high offence to us, that our fellow creatures have the ſame infirmities and vitious paſſions with ourſelves, that we muſt inexorably purſue them with hatred and revenge? Shall God forgive us his *ten thouſand talents*, and ſhall not we forgive our brother *his hundred pence?*---- Thus the example of the divine love to men, conſidered in every light, is the moſt powerful inducement and obligation to brotherly love among ourſelves.

BUT now to place the argument of the text in another point of view; In the *ſecond* place, the love of God to mankind is a motive for mutual love, as it lays us under an obligation to expreſs our gratitude to Almighty God by loving our fellow creatures. It is eternally fit and reaſonable that we ſhould in ſome manner expreſs our grateful ſenſe of the manifold favours of God. But what ſhall we render to him for his goodneſs and his *mercy that*

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*endureth for ever?* He is the Lord of heaven and earth, who is infinitely happy in the enjoyment of his own perfections: *our goodneſs extendeth not unto him*, and we *cannot by all our righteouſneſs profit God.* The only way in which we can ſhow our gratitude is by love and beneficence to our neighbours; whatever is done to them, God interprets as done to himſelf. Without this all the praiſes and thankſgivings we offer to him are to no purpoſe; and at the bottom are indeed but mere hypocriſy: *to do good and to communicate are the ſacrifices with which God is well pleaſed.* This is the homage, the tribute, he requires of us for all we hold of him. When we are obliged to any of our fellow creatures for any important and conſiderable favour, what a pleaſure is it to the man of a generous ſoul to be able to make the leaſt return? how will he ſearch for opportunities of ſhowing that he is not guilty of the worſt of vices, Ingratitude? If his benefactor himſelf be above receiving any

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ſervice from him, how fond will he be to expreſs his gratitude to his relations, his friends, his acquaintances? how ready to ſerve any whom his benefactor recommends to him? nay, to ſhow, a more than ordinary love and reſpect to his very ſervants? All this his benefactor with the greateſt reaſon conſtructs as done to himſelf, and is thereby fully aſſured, that were he in circumſtances that admitted of it, the ſame or higher expreſſions of gratitude would be ſhown to him.

Now all mankind being the children and offspring of our heavenly father, to whom we are infinitly more indebted than we can be to the whole world; being his friends whom he recommends in the moſt earneſt manner to our love and favour; being his ſervants ſent here upon their Maſter's work; ſhall we deny to them, who are thus related to our heavenly Father, the author of all our mercies, what we would not refuſe to thoſe who

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ſtood in the ſame relation to any benefactor on earth? The ingratitude, the guilt and folly of ſuch conduct will ſtill more fully appear, if we conſider,

THAT our heavenly Benefactor beſtows theſe gifts and bleſſings upon us, not for our own ſakes only, but with intention that we ſhould employ them for the good and advantage of others. The happineſs of his creatures is what God propoſes in all his diſpenſations; in this he declares that he delights; 'tis with a deſign to promote this, he beſtows particular gifts and bleſſings on any of his creatures; and ſo far as they do not lay them out for this noble purpoſe, ſo far they fruſtrate the deſign of God, and as it were alienate and embezzle the good things he has entruſted them with; than which nothing can be more baſe and unworthy.

LET us, for the improvement and illuſtration of this thought, take a ſhort view

view of ſome of the moſt diſtinguiſhing gifts God beſtows on men; let us conſider how God deſigns they ſhould be improved, and what ingratitude of conſequence there is in the contrary conduct. -----Has God for inſtance bleſſed a man with greater parts, and a higher meaſure of underſtanding and judgment than the generality of mankind? his deſign in it is, and he requires it of him, in acknowledgment of his owing that valuable gift to him, that he lay it out on ſtudies and inquiries that may tend to the good of mankind. Thus men of theſe diſtinguiſhed endowments may be ſingularly uſeful to others, by ſearching out methods how their lives may be render'd more agreeable and eaſy to them; how their health and vigour may be preſerved and reſtored; how their laudable induſtry in every employment may be crowned with ſucceſs; how trade and the arts neceſſary to mankind, and beneficial to their country, may be improved and carried on to the beſt advan-

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advantage, and (which is the nobleſt ſtudy men of ſuperior talents can be engaged in) how men may be engaged to the love of religion and virtue; laying themſelves out to anſwer their objections, to remove their prejudices, and to convince them that their happineſs as men and members of ſociety depends on their living *ſoberly, righteouſly and godly*. By ſuch means as theſe, men of eminent abilities of mind have it in their power, and are required to be public bleſſings and patriots in the nobleſt ſenſe. But how mean and unworthy is it in them to throw away their abilities on ſtudies trifling and whimſical, that miniſter to no purpoſe except to feed their own pride and ſelf-conceit? How monſtrouſly ingrateful is it to lay them out in projecting ſchemes to diſorder the ſociety of which they are members, in ſowing diſſenſion and diſcord, in blaſting the reputation of their neighbour, and ſuch other vile deſigns? How ſuperlatively baſe is it to proſtitute

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their knowledge and learning in fruitleſs endeavours to ſap the foundations of religion and virtue; or their wit in fooliſh attempts to turn them into ridicule? What is this but turning the gift of God againſt himſelf, and ungratefully attacking him with his own weapons?

LET us next, for another inſtance, take the men advanced to power and authority. God requires of them, that they ſhould acknowledge him as the fountain of power, the great Governor among the nations; by being the miniſters of God for the good of mankind, by ſtudying the welfare and happineſs of thoſe under their authority; by promoting peace and good order; by *removing violence and ſpoil*, and *taking away exactions from the people*; by defending the poor and the fatherleſs, doing juſtice to the afflicted and the needy, and delivering them from the hands of oppreſſors. As there is no gift of God whatſoever that enables a man, and affords

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fords him opportunities of doing more noble ſhining acts of beneficence than this of power and authority, ſo there is no gift beſtowed on men with a more expreſs condition that it ſhould be thus laid out. The great, the only end of government is the good of mankind. This therefore ſhould be the only end propoſed by thoſe who are advaneed to it. And for a man to imagine, that he as the particular favourite of heaven is ſet over a people, for his own ſake, to purſue his own deſigns; that he by a divine right has got the property of a whole nation, and may without controul uſe them as his ſlaves or his cattle; is an abſurdity ſo monſtrous, that it is ſurpriſing how it ever entred into the mind of man. How ungrateful muſt we reckon them, who turn this gift of God, deſigned for the ſafety and protection of mankind, to their ruin and deſtruction, by *decreeing*, as the prophet expreſſes it, *unrighteous decrees, and writing grievouſneſs, which they have preſcribed, to turn aſide the needy from judgment*,

*ment, to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherleſs.* ‡

I SHALL only mention another diſtinguiſhing gift, and that is riches and an opulent fortune, which likewiſe enables thoſe on whom it is beſtowed to do great good to their fellow-creatures, and which is in the ſame manner to be conſidered as a truſt repoſed in them for that end. All men being naturally equal, have an original right to an equal ſhare of the good things of this world; and one main reaſon why God has eſtabliſhed a diverſity of condition among men is, to give them an occaſion of exerciſing this noble virtue of goodneſs and beneficence, that the rich might honour him with their ſubſtance, by being *ready to diſtribute, willing to communicate, dealing their bread to the hungry, covering the naked,* and *bringing the poor that are caſt out to their houſes*; as every

‡ Iſa. x. 1. 2.

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one hath *received the gift of God*, ſo *miniſtring the ſame one to another*, and according to the kindneſs God hath ſhown to them, ſo doing to their neighbour. The thanksgiving moſt proper for the rich man to offer up to God is this, that God has put him in the bleſſed condition of giving rather than of receiving. He ſhould remember, that tho' in the eye of the world he is maſter of his own eſtate, and may give or not as he thinks proper, yet in reality he is only the ſteward of God our heavenly Father, who has entruſted him with ſo much of his treaſure to diſtribute to the poor on earth according to their neceſſities. How unworthy of this truſt then, how ungrateful muſt the wretch be, who *wraps up this talent in a napkin*, keeps it uſeleſs and unemployed, and unmercifully allows the children of the family to ſtarve for want of food? And how baſe muſt we eſteem him, who ſquanders away on himſelf in a gaudy magnificence, intemperance or luxury, what God deſigned

ed to be the patrimony of the poor? Thus theſe great gifts of God, underſtanding, power, and riches ought to be employed for the good of mankind, if we have any juſt and grateful ſenſe of the goodneſs of God in beſtowing them, and of the deſign on which they are beſtowed.

IN like manner every other gift or endowment which we poſſeſs, ſhould be improved, and our employing them to any contrary purpoſe is fruſtrating God's gracious deſign in beſtowing them, and is employing againſt him what he gives us to be laid out in his ſervice. It is thus we reaſon in the like caſes; when a man is retained in the ſervice of his prince, eats his bread, and daily receives marks of his favour and generoſity, what a monſter of ingratitude do we reckon him, if he be found privately counteracting the deſigns of his maſter, which tend to the good and advantage of the ſubjects, if he applies

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to his own private uſe what was deſigned for the public, and much more if he employs to their hurt and miſery what was deſigned to promote their welfare and happineſs; on ſuch a man we very liberally beſtow the worſt names. And what better is he, who is daily ſupported by the kindneſs of God our great Sovereign, and receives diſtinguiſhing marks of his goodneſs and beneficence, if he miſapply the valuable gifts that are beſtowed on him, if he improves them not in the way that God has deſigned and required; and if, inſtead of being a bleſſing, he becomes a curſe to his fellow-creatures? This is acting the traitor to his heavenly King, and doing all in his power to diſturb the beautiful order, and deſtroy the divine harmony of the government of the Deity, which in every part of its adminiſtration through the whole univerſe, is deſigned to bring about that glorious end, the good of the whole.

HAVING

HAVING now finiſhed the *firſt* part of the ſubject, and illuſtrated the argument for brotherly love, which ariſes from the general conſideration of God's love to mankind, I proceed to the *ſecond* general head, which was to ſhow, how the particular inſtance of God's love, in ſending his Son into the world, heightens the obligation we are under to the love of our brethren.

IN order to make this appear, the ſame reaſoning which was before uſed muſt be applied here, drawn from the pattern ſet before us, and the obligations from gratitude which we are laid under.

IN the *firſt* place, God's ſending Jeſus Chriſt into the world, gives us a more bright diſcovery of his goodneſs, a more perfect pattern and example than we could otherwiſe have had, and conſequently lays us under ſtronger obligations to imitate this goodneſs, and copy after this example. Here it might be of uſe to conſi-

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der distinctly the imperfectness of our discovery of the divine goodness from the works of creation and providence, and to compare it with the superior light with which it shines in the work of our redemption. The goodness of God is no doubt manifested through the whole creation. When we reflect on ourselves, how wonderfully we are framed, and how more wonderfully preserved in being; when we consider the vast variety of creatures that fill the earth, and how they are made to supply our wants, and to minister to our pleasure and delight; when we view the rich beauties of the material world, designed to please our sight, and inspire us with harmless joy, it would be impious not to raise our souls in praise to him, whose goodness has thus distinguished the children of men. But after all, 'tis certain, we now see the darker side of things. Had man continued in the blessed state of innocence and virtue, in which he first was made, as he had been a worthier object

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of the divine love, ſo every thing in him, and all things about him, would have more loudly proclaimed the goodneſs of his Maker. But man ſoon fell, and his innocence and happineſs ended together: his ſtrength is now weaken'd, his days are ſhorten'd, and he is *born to trouble as the ſparks fly upward.* A train of diſeaſes make havock on his body, noxious paſſions harraſs his mind, the troubles and calamities he is daily expoſed to render the *days of the years of his pilgrimage both few and evil.* The external frame of nature ſeems to have ſhared with man in his fall. Famine and peſtilence, earthquakes and tempeſts, often preſent us with diſmal proſpects, and ſeem to deform the face of nature.

THESE, and ſuch things as theſe, in ſome meaſure eclipſe the divine goodneſs. Theſe things making greater impreſſion on the minds of men than the bleſſings they enjoy, led ſome of the heathens to conceive

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ceive of their gods as grievous and hurtful to mankind; and others to imagine two different principles or ſuperintending agents, one good and kind, the author of our happineſs; the other cruel and ill-natured, from whom flowed our miſery. Theſe opinions, no doubt, were equally abſurd and impious, and muſt have proceeded from a careleſs partial view of the works of God, and a groſs ignorance of his nature. Yet ſuch, it is certain, is the preſent calamity of our nature, and ſuch our ſituation in the world, that the ſovereign univerſal goodneſs can be only imperfectly known from the works of creation and providence, as they appear at preſent to our view.

BUT, if we turn our thoughts to thoſe diſcoveries made us by revelation of the love of God to men in Jeſus Chriſt, the moſt full and complete exemplification of perfect goodneſs opens to us at once. Here are no clouds to darken the proſpect, no occa-

occaſion of fears, jealouſies, or doubts, to ariſe and perplex our minds. But the Deity is preſented to us under the character of the moſt affectionate and compaſſionate parent, interpoſing to reſcue his creatures from extreme diſtreſs, and to reſtore order among his works, by delivering his own Son to the death, when no inferior propitiation could anſwer the ends of juſtice and wiſdom. All the circumſtances attending this moſt remarkable diſpenſation concur to heighten the idea it gives us of the divine goodneſs. On theſe I ſhall not now enlarge, having lately illuſtrated them in another diſcourſe *. But taking it for granted, that in this inſtance, far above all others, the divine goodneſs is diſplayed to the view of Chriſtians, I ſhall proceed to ſhow what force and influence it ought to have upon us, conſidered as a pattern of goodneſs and love, for forming us to the like ſpirit with regard to our brethren of mankind.



* Vid. Serm. VIII.

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IN common life there are many things which we are taught by example and pattern; and, where the caſe admits of it, it is juſtly eſteemed the ſureſt and readieſt method of inſtruction. When a man has had the advantage of being inſtructed in any art, by examples of the moſt noble and complete kind, we reaſonably conclude, that he muſt have failed in his duty extremely, if he has not acquired ſome conſiderable knowledge in that art. The perſon, on the other hand, who has had the misfortune to have a more imperfect and leſs valuable pattern ſet before him, as we have not reaſon to expect ſo much from him, ſo we will not be ſurpriſed if he be found defective. This caſe, however low, may perhaps ſerve to give ſome light to the preſent ſubject.

THE great deſign of religion is to inſtruct us in virtue and goodneſs; as a proper means for this, we are directed to copy after the example of the infinitely perfect

perfect God. Here then God may be considered as our master and teacher in virtue. He teaches, by setting before us the example and pattern of his own moral perfections. On some he bestows the means of knowing these perfections in a smaller measure only, and in a more dark and imperfect way: the pattern they have to follow therefore must be less perfect. To others he discovers them in the fullest and brightest manner, and consequently the example set before them is more perfect and complete; God our heavenly Father may be said to bestow more pains on their instruction than on the others: and if they who have this superior advantage make not a suitable proficiency, or if they neglect to copy after the example that is set before them, they must be vastly more inexcusable than others; and, if the neglect of the duty be in them more inexcusable, their obligation to it must be stronger and of greater force.

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Now in goodneſs and beneficence, which of all the divine perfections is the moſt glorious in itſelf, and the moſt proper for our imitation, God inſtructs us, by his example, through the whole of his works and his diſpenſations to the children of men. As we are juſt now ſituated, in the works of creation and providence we are preſented with a pattern leſs bright and perfect. In the diſpenſation of the divine love, in our redemption, we have an example, which in brightneſs and perfection infinitely exceeds all we are capable of conceiving. Here it is that we are taught in a moſt lively manner, how good and merciful God himſelf is, and what kindneſs and love he would have us to ſhow to our brethren. In proportion therefore as this pattern which we enjoy is more perfect than the other; in the ſame proportion we are bound, by ſtronger obligations, to copy after it in love and beneficence to our fellow-creatures: and we will be more inexcuſable than thoſe who have

have only the leſs perfect pattern, if we be not thereby *transformed into the image of God*, and become *followers of him as dear children, perfect as he is perfect, and merciful as our heavenly Father is merciful.* Thus much concerning the firſt view, in which we are to conſider this inſtance of the goodneſs of God, as it ſets before us a pattern and example. SERM. IX.

IN the *ſecond* place, God's love in ſending Jeſus Chriſt into the world, lays us under particular obligations to love one another, as it is a greater favour and bleſſing than God had ever beſtowed on mankind, and conſequently lays us under ſtronger obligations to expreſs our gratitude and thankfulneſs to Almighty God, by loving and doing good to our fellow-creatures. That we are bound to ſhow our thankfulneſs to God for the favours he beſtows on us, is a thing too plain to need any proof: and that loving and doing good to our fellow-creatures is the beſt way

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way of expreſſing this thankfulneſs, is alſo abundantly evident, and has been illuſtrated in the preceeding part of this diſcourſe. Now our obligation to gratitude is always according to the nature and value of the favours beſtowed on us; and, if love to our fellow-creatures be the beſt way of expreſſing our gratitude for the favours we receive from God, we muſt be bound in a greater or leſſer degree to this love, in proportion to the nature and value of the bleſſings he has conferred upon us; and conſequently, if Jeſus Chriſt be the moſt valuable gift of God, if the bleſſings we enjoy by him be ſuperior to all others, we are thereby laid under the higheſt and ſtricteſt obligations to this love and beneficence.

I MUST not attempt in this place to give any account of the infinite worth of this bleſſing; the ſubject is too large and extenſive. The eternal, the only begotten Son of God, was the nobleſt, the moſt beneficial

neficial gift that it was poſſible, even for him, who is the fountain of all goodneſs, to beſtow. By him we are taught the ways of truth and righteouſneſs; by him we are delivered from the wrath of God, obtain the pardon of our ſins, are reſcued from the ſlavery of Satan, and advanced to the dignity of being the *ſons of God*. By him we are *created again unto holineſs*, and *made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the ſaints in light*; and by him, if we are his faithful diſciples, we are at length put in poſſeſſion of the crown of glory, the celeſtial happineſs that ſhall never decay. This, in ſhort, is a bleſſing ſo rich and valuable, that from it the apoſtle authoriſes us to draw this great concluſion, *That if God ſpared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how ſhall he not with him alſo freely give us all things?* As the bleſſing is in its own nature moſt valuable, ſo there are certain circumſtances attending it which greatly contribute to enhance its value; and, by conſequence, ought

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ought to increaſe our gratitude for it: that it was beſtowed when we were in circumſtances moſt deplorable, and had the leaſt reaſon to expect or hope for ſo great a mercy: that it is a bleſſing which, in a peculiar manner, diſtinguiſhes the children of men as the favourites of heaven; not common or promiſcuous like many other mercies we enjoy, but a bleſſing in which neither the higher nor the lower parts of creation ſhare with man, and which was not vouchſafed to a much nobler order of beings, the angels who fell; tho' they ſtood as much in need of it as we.----By reaſoning from this inſtance of divine love, above all others, we ſhall ſee the obligations to our duty, and the baſeneſs of the contrary conduct appear in the ſtrongeſt light.

LET us for illuſtration of this take ſome of the principal inſtances of beneficence we have occaſion to ſhow to our brethren, and conſider with what convincing force they

they may be deduced from the principle of gratitude to God, for his love in Jeſus Chriſt.

IN the firſt place then, as to the love we ought to ſhow to our brethren in their outward and temporal concerns; has God ſent his Son into the world to deliver us from hell and deſtruction, and ſhall we ſcruple to relieve the miſeries of our poor indigent brethren? Is God calling us to immortal glory and happineſs, and ſhall not we in return lend our aſſiſtance to make the lives of our fellow-creatures as happy as poſſible? Has God beſtowed on us this heavenly gift, the greateſt he could give, and ſhall we grudge him a part of our worldly goods? How ſmall is the demand, and diſproportioned to the favour! What are all earthly poſſeſſions to the bleſſings offered us in Jeſus Chriſt! And can we have a juſt ſenſe of their value, if we think a ſmall part of our periſhing riches too high a teſtimony of our

gratitude

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gratitude for them? The apoſtle *John*, in the preceeding chapter of this epiſtle, carries this point much farther, verſe 17. *Hereby perceive we*, ſays he, *the love of God, becauſe he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* A ſtrong expreſſion, to denote, that we are not to reckon any thing in our power too much, whereby we may contribute to the good of our fellow-creatures; even the ſacrificing our lives, if it may tend to their advantage, is no more than what we are bound to, in return for that love of God which delivered his Son to the moſt accurſed death, to redeem us from endleſs miſery, and purchaſe eternal life. And from this the apoſtle, in the next verſe, draws a very evident concluſion: *But whoſo hath this world's goods*, ſays he, *and ſeeth his brother have need, and ſhutteth up his bowels of compaſſion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?* The laying down of our lives is an inſtance of benevolence we are ſeldom called to, the circumſtances

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of our brethren ſeldom requiring it; but how oft are they oppreſs'd with want, even of the neceſſaries of life; and ſhall we, who are obliged to devote our lives for them, ſcruple to relieve their neceſſity, when we can do it at the cheap rate of beſtowing on them what to us is ſuperfluous and unneceſſary? Surely if we do, all our pretences of love and gratitude to God for his amazing goodneſs are empty, falſe and hypocritical.

IN the next place, has God ſhown ſuch concern for our ſouls, and ſhall not we ſhow ſome concern for the ſouls of others? The great, the glorious end, for which the Son of God was ſent into the world, even our redemption from the power of ſin and the ſlavery of Satan, points out to us, as the moſt proper inſtance by which we can expreſs our gratitude, the promoting the eternal happineſs and welfare of our fellow creatures. This is the natural expreſſion of thankfulneſs for ſuch a favour. And as

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the ſoul is more valuable than the body; as the bleſſedneſs of heaven is ſuperior to all worldly happineſs, and the miſery of hell more terrible than the greateſt wretchedneſs in this life; ſo the benevolence that reſpects the ſpiritual welfare of our fellow-creatures, vaſtly ſurpaſſes any kindneſs we can ſhow them in their outward eſtate and temporal concerns. Thus the inſtructing the ignorant, giving advice to the weak, reproving the careleſs, and even chaſtning the obſtinately wicked, when done from a right principle, and with prudence, by perſons of a proper character, are works of charity of a very noble kind.

CAN any man who himſelf is ſenſible of the importance of religion, who feels the happy influence of it on his own ſoul, who knows the bleſſedneſs of having peace with God, peace with himſelf, and the hope of eternal life; can ſuch a man, without the moſt tender compaſſion, look on his brother, whoſe mind is blinded by his luſts and paſſions, and who is ruſhing head-

headlong to eternal deſtruction? Will not gratitude to that God who has made ſuch a bleſſed change on his own ſoul, powerfully move him to do all he can to awaken his brother from his fatal ſleep, to rouze him from that lethargy, which, otherwiſe, will ſoon end in death? Will he not recommend to him religion and virtue, and endeavour to convince him, that *her ways are ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her paths are peace?* Will he not warn him of the deceitfulneſs of vice, and, with all the energy of the moſt real and friendly concern, ſet before him the trifling imaginary pleaſure, and the vaſt, the terrible danger there is in treading the paths of ſin?

WE muſt however beware of thinking, that by this beneficence to the ſouls of men, of how exalted a kind ſoever in itſelf, we may compound with them for ſhowing no regard to their outward neceſſities. We muſt not think that inſtruction will ſerve inſtead of alms to the beggar,

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beggar, or Chriſtian advice for bread to the hungry. No; for at this rate, all the concern we can ſhow for their ſpiritual welfare will paſs for a ſolemn piece of hypocriſy, the artful cloak of a niggardly uncharitable mind; and we will be ſaid to *love in word and in tongue*, but *not in deed and in truth*. But according to our ſeveral abilities we ought by relieving them in their temporal wants, firſt to convince them of our love and concern for them, and then our other endeavours will be better accepted, and meet with greater ſucceſs. There are many other important good offices to our neighbour, which here might have been mentioned, and deduced from the principle of gratitude to God for his wonderful love to us; but the time not allowing this, I come now to conclude the diſcourſe with a general reflexion on the whole ſubject.

HERE then we have ſet before us the moſt excellent means of raiſing and preſerving

ſerving in our ſouls this noble, this generous affection of love to our fellow creatures; even the ſerious and devout contemplation of the goodneſs of God, that love he has manifeſted to the children of men in all his works and ways, but more eſpecially in Jeſus Chriſt. Were our minds duly impreſſed with a ſenſe of the divine goodneſs, and did we often raiſe our thoughts to the glorious pattern here propoſed, how natural would it be for every ingenuous ſpirit to draw the concluſion in the text, *if God has ſo loved us, ought we not alſo to love one another?*------ How happy were it for us, to be in this reſpect Chriſtians indeed, as we are in name and profeſſion? Our religion is truly a religion of love; this is the ſum of all it commands us; this ſhone moſt conſpicuouſly in the character of our bleſſed Lord while on earth; and this he has appointed to be the mark and character of his diſciples to the end of the world. The time has been, when this virtue ſhining

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ing brightly in the lives of Chriſtians recommended their religion to others, and extorted praiſes even from its bittereſt enemies. When the kindneſs, the charity, the love that mutually prevailed among Chriſtians forced the learned heathen to conclude, that the doctrine which produced ſuch bleſſed effects muſt needs be divine. But to our ſhame, we have *fallen from this firſt love*; we have forgot, or we deſpiſe the ſacred ties by which as Chriſtians we are united together. The benevolence of a Chriſtian, no doubt, ought to be univerſal, and it is the honour of our religion that it enjoins love to all men. But it is not in the leaſt inconſiſtent with this, that there ſhould be a particular love required between thoſe that are members of the Chriſtian ſociety, as there ſubſiſts a particular connexion among them. The warmer affections that are between father and ſon, brother and brother, and friend and friend, were never thought inconſiſtent with univerſal benevolence. Theſe

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more private affections, if well regulated, will rather diſpoſe us for the other: and without theſe 'tis to be feared there would be little of that extenſive love in the world. The Chriſtian religion therefore requires nothing mean and unworthy of its character, when it commands us to *do good unto all, but eſpecially to thoſe of the houſhold of faith.* We are all fellow-ſervants of the ſame Lord, we are *all members of one body, whereof Jeſus Chriſt is the head*; a body which God hath *ſo tempered together, that there ſhould be no ſchiſm in it; that whether one member ſuffer, all the members ſuffer with it; or whether one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.* * Have we all *one maſter, even Chriſt*, and ſhall we not *have peace one with another?* are we all brethren, and ſhall we not love as brethren? are we all *members of one body*, and ſhall we not join in promoting each other's happineſs and welfare? ſhall we not be grieved with each

* 1 Cor. xii. 25, 26.

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other's pain, and mutually rejoice in each other's health and ſoundneſs? ſhall a trifling diſtinction of rank beget envy or contempt? ſhall every ſally of paſſion raiſe hatred and revenge? ſhall *fooliſh* and *unlearned queſtions gender ſtrife?* ſhall the too eager purſuit of riches and power diſturb that peace and harmony that ought to be among thoſe who profeſs the religion of love? No, ſure; but *let us as the children of God, holy and beloved, put on bowels of mercy, kindneſs, meekneſs, long-ſuffering, humility, forbearing one another and forgiving one another; and above all, let us put on charity which is the bond of perfectneſs*; and thus we ſhall ſhew ourſelves to be the diſciples of him, who has commanded us to *love one another as he has loved us.*

The

# The Characters of TRUE and FALSE WISDOM.

## A LECTURE.

JAMES iii. 13.----to the end.

V. 13. *Who is a wiſe man, and endowed with knowledge among you? let him ſhew out of a good converſation his works with meekneſs of wiſdom.*

14. *But if ye have bitter envying and ſtrife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not againſt the truth.*

15. *This wiſdom deſcendeth not from above, but is earthly, ſenſual, deviliſh.*

16. *For where envying and ſtrife is, there is confuſion, and every evil work.*

17. *But the wiſdom that is from above, is firſt pure, then peaceable, gentle, and eaſy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocriſy.*

18. *And the fruit of righteouſneſs is ſown in peace of them that make peace.*

IN order to our having a diſtinct view of this excellent paſſage of ſcripture,

it will be of uſe to inquire into the connection of it with what goes before, and the occaſion upon which it is introduced. From the beginning of the chapter the apoſtle had repreſented with the greateſt eloquence the dreadful wickedneſs of a malicious unbridled tongue, that *unruly evil which is full of deadly poiſon*; that *world of iniquity which defileth the whole body, which ſetteth on fire the courſe of nature, and is itſelf ſet on fire of hell.* With equal force of reaſon he ſhows, how abſurd and contradictory it is, that the member which we employ in the heavenly exerciſe of *bleſſing* and praiſing God, ſhould ever be proſtituted to ſo baſe and ſo impious a purpoſe, as the *curſing* and reviling thoſe *who are made after the ſimilitude of God*; how unnatural and monſtrous it is, that the tongue, which this moment is employed in adoring the divine mercy and goodneſs, ſhould the next be employed in backbiting and ſlander, and *caſting about firebrands, arrows and death. Doth a fountain,*

*tain*, ſaith the apoſtle, *ſend forth at the ſame place ſweet water and bitter? Can the fig-tree*, my brethren, *bear olive-berries, either a vine figs? ſo can no fountain both yield ſalt water and freſh; and neither ought there out of the ſame mouth to proceed bleſſing and curſing.*

But as the apoſtle very well knew, that how ſtrong and juſt ſoever theſe reaſonings were, yet they would not make ſufficient impreſſion on the bulk of men; he therefore, in the verſes which were now read, ſets himſelf to trace this evil to the ſource, and to correct thoſe falſe principles from which all the diſorders of the tongue flow. Whence is it that the tongue has become the inſtrument of ſo much wickedneſs and confuſion in the world? Is it from pure unmixed malice? Can we from the infamy, diſgrace or miſery of our fellow-creatures in themſelves, reap pleaſure or happineſs? and are men wicked merely from love to wickedneſs itſelf? No; this

is a height of vice, which our nature, fallen and degenerate as it is, ought not to be charged with. But it is pride, that ſelfiſh paſſion, which tells us, that by every bright and ſhining character our own is darkened and eclipſed, and perſuades us, that by blackening the characters of others, our own will appear in a more advantageous light. It is pride that makes us blind to our wants and failings, and at the ſame time renders us quick-ſighted in diſcerning the ſmalleſt imperfections of others: and whence comes this pride, but from a conceit of ſuperior worth and merit in ourſelves, from an opinion of our being poſſeſſed of thoſe good qualities, which we deſpiſe others for the want of, or of our being free from thoſe faults and blemiſhes which we obſerve and cenſure in others?

Now, of all the accompliſhments that men value themſelves upon, the endowments and abilities of the mind bear the

firſt place: to theſe, men have thought fit to give the honourable name of wiſdom, and it is the conceit or affectation of a ſuperiority in this wiſdom, which is the great ſource of pride, as pride is the ſource of thoſe evils the apoſtle has been inveighing againſt. This bad effect it had in a remarkable manner on the *Jews*, to whom you find this epiſtle particularly directed. They were ſo exceſſively proud of an imagined ſuperiority in wiſdom and knowledge, that they looked down on the reſt of mankind with a diſdainful haughtineſs, reviled them as no better than dogs, and judged them unworthy of their regard and friendſhip. Their doctors, who ſpent their time in the ſtudy of the law, advanced in inſolence and ill-nature, as they did in learning, expected to be adored by the people, and treated with the greateſt bitterneſs and moſt ſcandalous reproaches all that oppoſed them, or refuſed them that profound reſpect to which they thought themſelves intitled. Even thoſe

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who had become converts to Chriſtianity ſtill retained too much of this pride, malice and bitterneſs. Theſe evil paſſions ordinarily vented themſelves in reviling and calumny, and produced the greateſt diſorder and confuſion in ſociety. To put a ſtop therefore to theſe practices, ſo inconſiſtent with the ſpirit of the goſpel, the apoſtle here examines this wiſdom of theirs, and proves from its producing ſuch effects, that it muſt be falſe and corrupt, *earthly*, *ſenſual* and *deviliſh*. And as the comparing of two contrary objects makes each of them appear in a ſtronger light, he ſets the characters and effects of true wiſdom in oppoſition to thoſe of that wiſdom which they gloried in; that by the beauty and excellency of the one, the deformity of the other might make the deeper impreſſion on their minds.

In the 13th verſe, he addreſſes them in a general way, *Who is a wiſe man, and endowed with knowledge amongſt you, let him ſhew*

*ſhew out of a good converſation his works with meekneſs of wiſdom.*----Ye court the name of *Rabbi*, and diſtinguiſh yourſelves by the title of the wiſe men; but is there any amongſt you, who would appear eminent for wiſdom, and would really deſerve that honourable character you ſo much pretend to? it muſt not be by an extraordinary proficiency in this or the other piece of learning, nor even by a greater knowledge in religion and the myſteries of the law, that you are to ſupport this claim: it muſt not be by aſſuming airs of ſuperiority, and treating with ill-nature and contempt thoſe whom you think below you. But *let him ſhew out of a good converſation his works with meekneſs of wiſdom.* Let him by a good converſation, a life of virtue and goodneſs, ſhow his works, the effects of his wiſdom, *in meekneſs.*

Tho' there is nothing men pretend to more generally than wiſdom, nothing which they can bear worſe than the con-

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trary character, yet there is nothing in their notions of which they have been more generally miſtaken. That wiſdom is the purſuing the worthieſt ends by the moſt proper means, has indeed always been acknowledged; but in chuſing the ends moſt worthy of their purſuit, mankind have too generally failed, and thus have catched at ſhadows inſtead of the ſubſtance. As the worthieſt end that can be purſued by a rational creature is the perfection and happineſs of his nature; as the proper means for this is the improvement of himſelf in virtue and goodneſs; ſo the only valuable wiſdom muſt lye in the purſuit of happineſs, by the practice of holineſs and virtue. This is what the apoſtle here expreſſes by *a good converſation*; and this is the notion of true wiſdom, which is given us in the word of God. *Behold the fear of the Lord is wiſdom, and to depart from evil is underſtanding. The wiſdom of the prudent is to underſtand his way. I lead in the way of righteouſneſs*, ſaith Wiſdom,

dom, *in the midſt of the paths of judgment; pride and arrogance, and the evil way and the froward mouth do I hate.* All the other qualifications which the world have dignified with this name, are only valuable, when they are accompanied with this, and conduce to it as their great end. The man of clear underſtanding and extenſive learning has commonly paſs'd with the world for a wiſe man, and the man who has the dexterity of managing the buſineſs of life with art and prudence we commonly honour with the ſame character. But theſe qualities are not of themſelves ſufficient to denominate the poſſeſſors of them truly wiſe. The men of the greateſt abilities may, and often do, lay out theſe abilities in deſigns the moſt baſe and pernicious; and the art of managing worldly affairs is too commonly employed in overreaching and taking the advantage of thoſe we deal with, and frequently deſerves the name of knaviſh cunning, rather than wiſdom. But if a man employ his knowledge

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and judgment in regulating his own conduct according to the rules of virtue, in advancing the glory of God, and the welfare of his fellow-creatures; if he lay out his talent for buſineſs in promoting what is juſt and laudable, in relieving the oppreſs'd, and ſupporting the intereſts of equity, mercy and truth in the world, then only it becomes that true wiſdom, which is the greateſt ornament of our nature.

A PROFOUND knowledge in religion, and ſkill in nicely determining caſes of their law, was the wiſdom of the *Jewiſh* doctors: but of what uſe was all this knowledge, if, in proportion to it, their lives were not more holy and righteous, and more conform'd to thoſe precepts they had ſo much ſtudied? Knowledge in religion is neceſſary to regulate our practice in it; but if we apply it not to this purpoſe, it can be of no other uſe, but to render our condemnation the greater; as it is the miſimprovement of greater advantages.

Therefore,

Therefore, ſays the apoſtle, *Is there any man endowed with knowledge among you?* this knowledge is good for nothing, if he cannot ſhow the effects of it by a *good converſation*; and this *good converſation*, by which we are to ſhow our wiſdom, in which true wiſdom really conſiſts, muſt be accompanied with *meekneſs*. *Let him ſhew out of a good converſation his works with meekneſs of wiſdom.*

As *meekneſs* itſelf is a conſiderable part of the virtuous character, ſo it caſts a beauty and grace on all the other parts of it. It is *an ornament, which in the ſight of God is of great price*, and a conſtant attendant of true wiſdom. The truly wiſe man will ſo rule his own ſpirit, as to think humbly of himſelf; to love, regard, and honour his fellow-creatures; will not be filled with pride, ill-nature and frowardneſs; but inſpired with moderation towards all men, ſo that *in lowlineſs of mind* he will *eſteem another better than himſelf*, will be ready *in honour to prefer him*, and

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tho' *ſtrong*, will *bear the infirmities of the weak*. It is only falſe wiſdom which is conſiſtent with wickedneſs and folly, which is productive of pride and ill-nature, and is ſeldom to be found without them. How oft may we ſee men, by ſuperior attainments in learning, and a conceit of brighter parts, ſo ſwelled with pride and arrogance as to become intolerable to thoſe they converſe with? Tho' meekneſs and modeſty be the amiable qualities that ſet off ſuperior endowments, and make them valued and admired by the world; yet there is nothing more certain than the apoſtle's ſentence, that *knowledge puffeth up*; fills men with pride, and an inſolent contempt of the reſt of the world. The apoſtle therefore very juſtly lays down this particular quality of meekneſs as the diſtinguiſhing mark, by which we may diſcern between true and falſe wiſdom, the one being always accompanied with it, and the other, for the moſt part, with the

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quite oppoſite qualities, which the apoſtle goes on to ſhew in the

14th VERSE. *But if ye have bitter envying and ſtrife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not againſt the truth.* If that wiſdom of yours beget envy and ſtrife, inſtead of meekneſs, *glory not*; value not yourſelves too highly on your poſſeſſing it, nor flatter yourſelves, that it is ſo excellent an attainment. *Lie not againſt the truth*; that is, pretend not that it is the true wiſdom, which deſerves the approbation of our own minds, and the higheſt regard and honour from mankind. Nothing is more certain, than that the falſe wiſdom, of which virtue makes no part, is frequently productive of the worſt diſpoſitions, and eſpecially of envy, that noxious paſſion, which is poiſon to every good quality of the heart; and which indeed of all our paſſions is the vileſt in its nature, and the moſt dangerous in its conſequences. *Wrath is cruel, anger is outragious,* but *who can*

*ſtand*

*ſtand before envy?* Does any of their fellow-creatures excel or but rival theſe pretended wiſe men in fame, for thoſe accompliſhments to which they lay claim? Their proud hearts cannot bear it; they begin to look upon him with a malicious eye, and their ſecret grudge ſoon breaks out in all the arts of reproach and calumny to leſſen his character; they queſtion his attainments as falſe and ſuperficial, and leave no way untried to rob him of the eſteem and reſpect of the world. This *bitter envying* naturally begets *ſtrife*; deſtroys that peace, friendſhip and good underſtanding which ſweetens ſociety, and in the room of theſe produces enmity and contention. In how many inſtances may we ſee the ambitious purſuit of reputation for this falſe wiſdom followed with all theſe miſchievous effects? Men who from their childhood have been companions and friends, when their characters come to be oppoſed to each other, and the world is putting the queſtion, who has the ſuperiority,

periority, will then begin to ſhow a ſenſible coldneſs to each other: their mutual confidence ceaſes, their friendly intercourſe is at an end, and by degrees their former friendſhip degenerates into an inveterate enmity; and yet theſe very men will glory in their wiſdom, and all the quarrel is, that the one pretends to have more than his neighbour of that which with the men of the world paſſes under that term. But tho' they have *ſaid they will be wiſe, yet it is far from them, for their fooliſhneſs hath perverted their ways*, and *the thoughts of their hearts are vanity.*

For *this wiſdom* which occaſions ſuch *ſtrife and envying*, verſe 15, *deſcendeth not from above, but is earthly, ſenſual, deviliſh.* It is not the true, the heavenly wiſdom which aſſimilates us to God, of which he is the moſt perfect pattern; of which, he is the fountain and ſource; and which, by the benign influences of his grace, is begot and nouriſhed in the minds of men. But it *is earthly:* as things in a figurative

way are ſaid to be *heavenly*, when they are of a noble exalted kind; ſo in oppoſition to this character, when any thing is ſaid to be *earthly*, it denotes the lowneſs, meanneſs and baſeneſs of its nature. And this wiſdom is not only *earthly*, in this ſenſe, as there is nothing heavenly or excellent in its nature; but as it has no higher aim than attaining the honours and profits of the preſent life, and is moved by a vain ambition for fame and reputation, or a meaner paſſion after riches and wealth; while the true wiſdom has a nobler aim, and a more exalted view, and by the purſuit of virtue and goodneſs here, aſpires at that happineſs, which conſiſts in the perfection of virtue and goodneſs above: *The way of life is above to the wiſe to depart from hell beneath.*

*Senſual*; The word ſo rendered is commonly in the new teſtament tranſlated *natural*. The *natural man receiveth not the things of the ſpirit of God*; and the meaning

meaning here muſt be, that it is a wiſdom that can only take place, while our natures are corrupted, and before they are ſanctified by the ſpirit of God; a wiſdom which is not the *fruit of the ſpirit*, but of the *fleſh which luſteth againſt the ſpirit*; among the works of which the apoſtle numbereth *hatred, variance, emulation, wrath, ſtrife and ſeditions.*

But this wiſdom is not only *earthly* and *ſenſual*, but *deviliſh.* As every good gift and valuable quality is in the new teſtament aſcribed to the influence of the divine grace, ſo the contrary diſpoſitions and effects are aſcribed to and repreſented as flowing from an oppoſite principle; even the power of evil ſpirits in our minds. But without confining it to this view, this character of the falſe wiſdom may be explained as denoting that it inſpires us with ill-nature, malice and cruelty, and thus gives us a great reſemblance to thoſe fallen angels, who having irrecoverably forfeited their own

happineſs, delight in deſtroying the happineſs of others. To prove that this wiſdom which begets *ſtrife* and *envy* deſerves theſe bad characters he had given of it, the apoſtle ſubjoins in the

16th Verse, *For where envying and ſtrife is, there is confuſion and every evil work.* Such is the miſchievous nature of envy and ſtrife, that when they have taken poſſeſſion of mens hearts, they deſtroy the peace and quiet of their lives, produce the greateſt tumults and diſorders in ſociety, and lead men to the commiſſion of all manner of wickedneſs. How miſerable muſt he be, whoſe mind is harraſs'd with theſe uneaſy paſſions? The man of a friendly benevolent temper enjoys a ſweet calm in his own mind; he is happy in the happineſs of thoſe about him; he reaps a ſenſible pleaſure and joy from the welfare of his fellow-creatures, and thus has a double ſource of peace and delight. As for the envious man on the other hand, the

the proſperity and welfare of thoſe around him is to him gall and bitterneſs, and blaſts the comfort he might otherways have in the moſt favourable ſituation of life. His turbulent and vitious paſſions allow him no reſt, but unweariedly puſh him on from one dark contrivance to another. And the bad conſequences of theſe paſſions are not confined within his own breaſt, but produce the greateſt diſturbance in ſociety, for *where envying and ſtrife is, there is confuſion.*

How oft may we ſee the pride and ambition, the envious ſeditious temper of one ſingle man, ſet a whole people in a flame; and that which was originally but a quarrel between two private perſons, divide a nation into parties, and ferment into the greateſt heat, noiſe and tumult? Could we trace back to their firſt ſprings thoſe inteſtine wars that break the peace of nations, we would find them to have ariſen from private contentions and animoſities

reigning

reigning at firſt in the breaſts of a few men, but which, like fire ſpreading by degrees, at length produce a general conflagration. Theſe more ſecret ſprings will no doubt be carefully hidden, and the moſt ſpecious pretences will be given out to draw others into the contention; religion, liberty, and every thing that is valued and eſteemed by men, will be brought into the cauſe, and even peace itſelf will be brought upon the field to countenance confuſion and war; while, in the mean time, the vain ambition or unbounded avarice of ſome, and the envy and ſtrife of others, is at the bottom of all.

But ſtrife and envy produce not only *confuſion*, but *every evil work*. How juſtly the apoſtle has added this clauſe, every one will ſee, who reflects to what an extraordinary height of wickedneſs men frequently ariſe, in the purſuit of thoſe conteſts occaſioned by their envy and ſtrife. All the arts of ſlander, defamation and calumny

ny will be put in practce ; corruption and falſhood, partiality and injuſtice, nay violence and oppreſſion will go eaſily down, if they but ſeem to tend to the advantage and ſucceſs of their deſigns ; deſigns baſe beyond all doubt, when brought about or ſupported by ſuch execrable means. Can then a quality which has ſuch pernicious effects, and which gives birth to ſuch corrupt diſpoſitions, deſcend from above ? Can hatred and envy come from him who is love ? or ſtrife and confuſion from the God of peace and order ? Can that which gives riſe to ſo much wickedneſs proceed from him whoſe *name is holy, all whoſe ways are righteouſneſs and truth?* Can that deſerve the name of wiſdom, which robs our ſouls of reſt ? which raiſes a thouſand uneaſy paſſions in our breaſts, and is inconſiſtent with the peace and happineſs of our fellow-creatures ? How great is the degeneracy and corruption of mankind ! There is nothing worthy and excellent which they have not defaced,

have

have not preverted into a ſort of conformity with their own vitiated minds. Religion and wiſdom were things too venerable to be entirely exploded; but men have found means to make religion conſiſtent with wickedneſs, and wiſdom with vice and folly; to turn religion into the ſuperſtitious obſervance of rites and ceremonies, and entirely to exclude virtue from the notion of wiſdom; that tho' they had no pretenſions to religion and wiſdom itſelf, they might at leaſt be flattered with the honourable name.

THE apoſtle having laid before us the bad conſequences of thoſe perverſe notions which prevailed in the world, and having given a juſt account of the nature and effects of that falſe and ſpurious wiſdom, in which the men of the world are ready ſo much to glory; in the next verſe opens to us a ſcene more delightful and agreeable.

VERSE

VERSE 17th. *But the wiſdom which is from above is firſt pure, then peaceable, gentle and eaſy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocriſy.* Here all I can propoſe, is, ſhortly to hint at what may be meant by theſe different characters of true wiſdom. The general deſcription of it is, that it *deſcendeth from above:* the import of which will be ſufficiently underſtood, by what has been already ſaid under the 15th verſe. Some indeed, by this wiſdom that is *from above*, do not underſtand wiſdom, as it is an excellent quality, habit or principle of virtue in the ſoul; but take the apoſtle here to be giving the characters of the Chriſtian religion, of that doctrine of morality which Jeſus came down from heaven to teach the world, in oppoſition to that corrupt morality taught and practiſed by the *Jewiſh* teachers, which they think he had before repreſented as the wiſdom which *deſcendeth not from above, but is earthly, ſenſual and deviliſh.*

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The ancients, when ſpeaking of any valuable art or diſcovery highly beneficial to mankind, commonly deduce its origin from heaven, and acknowledge that they owed it to the teaching of the gods. Thus fire is ſaid to have been ſtolen from heaven; the uſeful arts of agriculture, and ſuch like, are aſcribed to the direction of ſuch and ſuch particular deities; and philoſophy itſelf is ſaid to have come down from heaven. Whether they really believed that they owed every bleſſing, every valuable piece of knowledge to the goodneſs of their gods, and the kind interpoſition of heaven; or whether, by theſe ways of ſpeaking, they would only expreſs the excellency of the things themſelves, needs not be inquired into. But here, in both theſe ſenſes, may it be ſaid of true wiſdom, that it *deſcendeth from above*, as it is highly excellent in itſelf, and as it is the gift of him who *poſſeſſed wiſdom in the beginning of his ways, before his works of old*; who *underſtandeth the way and knoweth the place*

*place thereof*; who *giveth wiſdom to the wiſe, and knowledge to them that know underſtanding*. And indeed it muſt be owned, that many of the properties of the true wiſdom are very applicable to the Chriſtian revelation. It cometh from above, in the moſt excellent ſenſe; it is not the product of impoſture, the invention of crafty prieſts or deſigning politicians, but came from him who *was in the boſom of the Father*, and appeared on earth to reveal him to the children of men; who, by his wonderful works, his holy life, and his divine precepts, proved himſelf to be a teacher come from God. Again, as the deſign and natural tendency of the religion of Chriſt is to make us holy, peaceable, moderate, merciful and beneficent, theſe characters may, in a figurative way, be applied to the religion itſelf.

But as ſome other of theſe epithets cannot, without much force, be applied to any body and ſyſtem of precepts, we

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chuſe to conſider them in the ſame light in which we have already taken the characters of the falſe wiſdom, as marks and properties, or diſtinguiſhing effects of a certain quality in the ſoul; as characteriſtics, by which we may know, whether we be endowed with that true wiſdom which Jeſus Chriſt has inſtructed us in, and which is the effect of the Spirit working on our ſouls.

THIS wiſdom, then, is *firſt pure* or chaſt. That is ſaid to be pure and chaſte in its kind, whoſe natural ſimplicity or beauty, goodneſs or excellence, is not polluted or tainted by the addition or mixture of any thing that can defile or debaſe it. When applied to the ſoul and its affections, it denotes, that the beauty of the ſoul, that is its innocence and virtue, is not corrupted and deformed by any irregular deſires and vicious appetites. The wiſdom which the *Jewiſh* teachers valued themſelves upon, and which the generality of mankind

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are ready to be ſo fond of, Superiority in knowledge and the abilities of the mind, is in its own degree a very valuable quality, if it be pure and chaſte; that is, if it be not attended with pride and an overbearing opinion of a man's ſelf; if it be not productive of *envy, ſtrife, confuſion, and every evil work*; but being, as is too frequently the caſe, joined, and as it were blended with theſe bad qualities, it loſes its purity, and conſequently its excellence. But the *wiſdom which is from above* is not mixt with any vicious paſſion, is incapable of being moved by any wrong principle, or of propoſing to itſelf any end that is unworthy or mean. As it is pure and excellent in itſelf, ſo it is pure in its deſigns, and pure in all the means it uſes in bringing about theſe deſigns. As it propoſes a higher aim than the acquiſition of the riches, honours, or pleaſures of the preſent life; as its deſigns are more generous and noble than thoſe of the falſe wiſdom, ſo it cannot purſue theſe deſigns by

by thoſe baſe arts of diſſembling and equivocation, ill-nature and malice, ſtrife and contention, thoſe ordinary means by which the pretended wiſe men of the world carry on their favourite deſigns. The truly wiſe man will never do evil that good may come of it, or perſuade himſelf that the goodneſs, the lawfulneſs of the end will ſanctify the means, however baſe and diſhonourable.

HAVING mentioned this more general property, the apoſtle proceeds to thoſe which are more particular. It is obſervable, that he gives the wiſdom that is from above this character of pure, with an emphaſis, *firſt pure*, and *then*, ſays he, *peaceable*; intimating to us, that whatever qualifications a man's wiſdom may ſeem to have, it could not be from above, unleſs it were in the firſt place *pure*; that this is a qualification ſo fundamental, ſo neceſſary, that all the reſt would be deficient without it. *Peace*, *gentleneſs*, and the others

others that follow, are indeed excellent qualifications of wiſdom; but unleſs there be purity alſo, the character of the divine and heavenly wiſdom will not be complete.

THE wiſdom that is from above is *peaceable*. As this wiſdom is pure and untainted with any vicious paſſions, ſo it muſt needs be peaceable; for, *whence*, ſaith the apoſtle at the beginning of the following chapter, *come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even from your luſts that war in your members?* The truly wiſe man will abhor contention, and, *if it be poſſible, as much as in him lyes, will live peaceably with all men.* The wiſdom which is moved by pride and ambition muſt needs engender ſtrife and confuſion, as it is not to be expected, that thoſe worldly men will be ſo much mortified in their paſſions, as to bear with patience the diſreſpectful behaviour of others, and not endeavour to reſent it, even tho' their own haughty behaviour has given the firſt cauſe of offence.

ſence. Nay, how oft do the wiſe men of the world find tumults and diviſions neceſſary to bring about their intereſted deſigns; how oft do they rejoice in them in ſecret, as happy occaſions of ſhowing the ſuperior abilities they pretend to; and cheriſh and foment them as the effectual inſtruments of raiſing them to their wiſh'd for greatneſs. But the truly wiſe man, as he has no deſigns to purſue that are inconſiſtent with the intereſts of his fellow-creatures, and as he is under the influence of no unſocial paſſion that can render his behaviour offenſive to thoſe about him; ſo he muſt of courſe live peaceably with all men. He will delight in peace, as the beſt means to bring about thoſe honourable purpoſes he purſues of promoting his own happineſs by the good and virtuous government of his mind and affections, and of advancing the welfare of mankind. This and the former character are well put together in that precept of the apoſtle to the *Hebrews*; *Follow peace with all men, and*

*and holineſs*, (or purity) *without which no man ſhall ſee the Lord.* *

But this wiſdom is not only *peaceable*, but *gentle*, humane and moderate. True wiſdom will be ſo far from harbouring any of thoſe paſſions that are injurious and offenſive to our neighbour, and that diſturb the peace of ſociety, that it will inſpire us with an amiable ſweetneſs of temper. Here we receive ſome light from the oppoſite character, which *Solomon* deſcribes of thoſe who are *over-wiſe and righteous over-much*. There are men who affect an uncommon auſterity and ſtrictneſs, who, by their moroſe zeal and ill-timed ſeverity, deter people from their company, and repreſent wiſdom, religion and virtue in a very unpleaſant light; who, by an exceſſive ſtiffneſs and ſolemnity of behaviour, and an affectation of extraordinary gravity on every the leaſt occaſion, ſeem to diſcover the inward ſentiments of

* Heb. xii. 14.

their hearts to be, that they are the *only wiſe men, and that wiſdom will die with them*; and that they conſider it as an inſtance of condeſcenſion, when they daign to converſe with their fellow-creatures. This is the ſpirit, theſe are the manners of falſe wiſdom. But true wiſdom will make the generous love to mankind, that glows in our breaſts, appear in an engaging affability and complaiſance to thoſe we converſe with. Under the influence of this noble principle, inſtead of indulging a ſour, a peeviſh or angry temper, on any little vexations we may meet with from them, we will look upon theſe with indifference, as what we muſt expect from the unavoidable weakneſſes and infirmities of human nature, and will demonſtrate, by the continuance of our kind friendly behaviour, that we have overlooked theſe ſmall failings. Inſtead of giving way to any unbecoming heat and fury, upon any accidental oppoſition of ſentiments, or claſhing of intereſts, the truly wiſe man will bear it

with

with a noble conſtancy and equality of temper; knowing, that it is as abſurd to expect, in the preſent ſtate of things, that his friend ſhall always think as he thinks, or always concur in the ſame purſuits, and never have any worldly intereſts ſeparate from his, as it would be to expect that he ſhall have the ſame features and lineaments of face. He will ſupport his own opinions and intereſts with calmneſs and fairneſs, and treat his friend that differs from him with candour, moderation and gentleneſs.

But further, this wiſdom is *eaſy to be entreated*, or, as it may be better render'd, *eaſy to be perſuaded*. If any one have given offence to the truly wiſe man, he will eaſily be perſuaded to forgive him. If he himſelf has been in a miſtake, he will patiently hear what others can ſay for rectifying his error, and will not perſiſt in it againſt ſound reaſon offer'd to the contrary. He will liſten to any good advice that is

given him, and will not be hard to be wrought upon by the entreaties of thoſe that deſire his favour and aſſiſtance. All this I take to be included in this wiſdom's being *eaſy to be entreated*. It is not being eaſy to be moved merely by noiſe and importunity, without reaſon, againſt the ſettled judgment of a man's mind; this would be levity and folly: but it imports an eaſineſs to liſten to every thing that can in reaſon be propoſed to him, and a readineſs to aſſent and comply as ſoon as ever he is convinced thereby.

BIGOTRY is the offspring of pride and ignorance, and a very deſpicable character it forms. As this was very remarkable in the *Jews*, whom the apoſtle has here particularly in his eye, ſo it is a frequent attendant of falſe wiſdom. Men have ſuch an overweening opinion of themſelves, ſo low an opinion of others, that they conſider their own notions as ſo many oracles and inconteſtable principles; they deſpiſe what-

whatever is ſaid againſt them, are deaf to reaſon, and incapable of conviction; or, if the force of truth make any impreſſion on their minds, they are too proud to acknowledge it, and would think it a degrading of themſelves to own they had been in an error. But as true wiſdom inſpires a man with meekneſs and humility, ſo it gives him ſuch a love of truth, that he will embrace it and rejoice in it, from whatever quarter it comes, and however oppoſite it may be to his former darling opinions, which perhaps he has publiſhed and defended. His ingenuous ſoul cannot ſtand or reſiſt the force of evidence, and will rather give truth the victory, than at the expence of truth contend for conqueſt over one whom he may think a weaker adverſary. Had men always been ruled by ſuch noble and worthy principles as theſe, the church, the world had never been troubled with ſo many controverſies and diſputes of tedious length and uſeleſs bulk. But men, for the moſt part, are

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ſcarce well engaged in theſe debates, but the truth is immediately out of queſtion; and the only conteſt is, which of the two ſhall be reckoned the learnedeſt man and the acuteſt diſputant; which ſhall give the laſt blow, or ſhall firſt leave the field of battle. This is a weakneſs of the moſt ſcandalous, the moſt dangerous kind, and worſe even than bigotry itſelf. The truly wiſe man, as nothing but ſuperior evidence will ever move him from the profeſſion of what he thinks the truth; ſo whenever this appears, he will embrace its welcome light, and no mean conſideration will tempt him to diſown or reject it.

THE wiſdom that is from above, as it is *eaſy to be entreated*, ſo alſo is *full of mercy and of good fruits*. *Mercy* may be here taken for the inward principle, and *good fruits* for the effect of this principle in our outward actions. Divine wiſdom fills men with tenderneſs and compaſſion towards thoſe that are miſerable in any reſpect, whether

whether it be from their infirmities of body or mind, or from any calamity that befals them from without; it ſuppoſes them to look on the caſe of others as if it were their own; to have an inward feeling of their unhappineſs, and conſequently to do whatever lyes in their power for their relief or aſſiſtance; to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to viſit the ſick, to comfort the diſconſolate, to inſtruct the ignorant, to admoniſh and reclaim tranſgreſſors; theſe are the *good fruits* which naturally ſpring from the *mercy* here mentioned, of which the apoſtle tells us the wiſe man *is full.* True wiſdom will be particularly tender and compaſſionate towards thoſe who have erred from the right path, either in their principles or practice, inclining rather to ſave than to deſtroy them, and trying every poſſible laudable means of bringing them back to a right mind. If a pure and well-tempered zeal for the glory of God, and a tender pity and compaſſion for our brethren

are the principles (as they ought to be) by which we are acted, these principles will show themselves by their *good fruits*; they will never bring forth ill-nature and malice, violence and cruelty, force and persecution. These principles will never lead us to make havock of mens bodies for the good of their souls, or to imagine, that stripes and chains, racks and tortures are the proper means to convert the sinner, instruct the ignorant, or reduce the erroneous. These practices must flow from other, and from baser motives: and as every wise man must see that they are unfit to bring about the end they pretend to propose, so he that is endowed with this heavenly wisdom, of which *mercy* makes a chief character, will abhor them as worse than those evils they pretend to cure. But if his brother, who has gone astray, can be reduced by all the acts of charity, the testimonies of love, and good offices of friendship, by all the force of reason and persuasion, by the most convincing

vincing proof of his love and concern for him, theſe he will not fail to uſe, for theſe are the *good fruits* of his *mercy* towards his brethren. This is the wiſdom which diſcovers itſelf to have truly come *from above*, even from God the Father of all good, who deſireth the happineſs of his creatures; who is the *Lord God merciful and gracious, long-ſuffering, and ſlow to anger, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that they ſhould turn from their ways and live*; from that God, who hath commanded us to *be followers of him as dear children*, and to *be merciful as our Father in heaven is merciful.*

THIS *mercy* and all the former graces, the apoſtle tells us, the truly wiſe man will exerciſe *without partiality*, or without putting a difference between man and man. This was the intolerable vice of the *Jews*; they confined all their love, charity and beneficence firſt to their own nation, and when that was ſplit into parties,

ties, next to the faction they had joined with. This narrow contracted ſpirit made them odious even to the heathen world, whoſe writers we find repreſenting them in the blackeſt colours, for this very reaſon, as refuſing to ſhow the way to a wandering ſtranger, or denying him a draught of water tho' dying for thirſt. Of this likewiſe our bleſſed Saviour couches a very ſharp reproof in the parable of the *Samaritan* and the wounded man. And this perhaps is too much the vice of many Chriſtians, that they confine their charity to one party and denomination of Chriſtians; they are blind to the higheſt worth and merit, if it be on a different ſide from them, and equally blind to the greateſt faults and blemiſhes in thoſe of their own way: they will ſearch into private characters, and put the worſt conſtruction they can invent on the moſt indifferent actions of thoſe that differ from them; whereas the zealots on their own ſide are ſure to have the greateſt crimes

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apologized for, and the worſt character varniſhed over and ſet off in the beſt light.

But the truly wiſe man will judge of others according to their true and real characters, and not as prejudice or paſſion are apt to diſguiſe them; as he will take no pleaſure in raking into the vices of men of any ſide, ſo he will acknowledge and honour merit, wherever it appears. His ſoul is too great to be moved with theſe petty diſtinctions and differences that make ſuch deep impreſſions on the minds of others, and warp both their judgment and their affections. He obſerves a generous uniformity in his beneficence to mankind, and embraces as his friend a good and virtuous man, in whatever company he finds him.

But this impartiality is to be ſhown not only in our judgments of men and our behaviour towards them, but likewiſe

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in our judgment of opinions. It directs us not to allow the prejudices of education, or our veneration for any particular ſet of men, ſo to enſlave our minds, as (without examination) implicitly to receive any ſcheme of doctrine, or blindly to reject whatever may be contrary to it.

THE apoſtle concludes his account of *the wiſdom which cometh from above*, by telling us that it is *without hypocriſy* or diſſimulation; which may either ſignify, that it will not delight in vain oſtentation, as hypocrites are wont to do, whoſe higheſt deſign being to gain the eſteem of men, they will take the utmoſt pains to proclaim their own goodneſs, to divulge their piety and pretended virtues and good qualities before the world. True wiſdom, at the ſame time that it will do all that it can juſtly to deſerve the applauſe of men, will yet be ſo humble and modeſt, as rather to ſhun than to court it. Or in the more common acceptation of the word,

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the phraſe here uſed may denote being without diſſimulation, honeſt and ſincere. The truly wiſe man will abhor all trick and deceit, will neither be double fac'd nor double minded; will not *bleſs with his mouth and curſe inwardly, ſpeaking lies in hypocriſy*; will be affable, civil and courteous to thoſe he converſes with, but will never deſcend to baſe flattery, or ſooth bad men with compliments which his heart tells him they do not deſerve. He will not, by a friendly behaviour, cover an unfriendly mind, cover hatred by deceit, or inſinuate himſelf into the confidence of any man with a deſign to ſupplant and betray him. His whole behaviour towards his fellow-creatures will be nothing more than the expreſſion of the inward reſpect and love he really bears to them in his heart. *The heart of the wiſe teacheth his mouth*, but *he that flattereth his neighbour ſpreadeth a net for his feet; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin.*

THE apoſtle concludes the chapter, verſe 18th, *And the fruit of righteouſneſs is ſown in peace of them that make peace.* Which words may admit of two different interpretations. As the great deſign which the apoſtle has in view, as was before noticed, is to correct the pride, wrath and malice which prevailed among thoſe he wrote to, which he does by laying before them its bad conſequences, *ſtrife and confuſion*, and repreſenting how inconſiſtent it was with that true and heavenly wiſdom, which inſpires men with *gentleneſs, peace and mercy*: in this verſe he may be underſtood as ſhowing the advantages of following this true wiſdom, rather than indulging ſuch noxious paſſions. *The fruit*, the reward *of righteouſneſs is ſown in peace*; is kept and reſerved in a happier, a more peaceful and glorious ſtate hereafter, *of them that make peace*, that is, for them that are endued with this wiſdom, which delights in peace. The fruits are the reward of the toil of the husband-

husbandman; theſe fruits may be ſaid to be *ſown*, when that ſeed is ſown which by the bleſſing of God will produce them. The apoſtle therefore tells us that *peace* is a ſeed, which whoever ſows, it will by the goodneſs of God yield to him the *fruits of righteouſneſs*; the like figure is uſed by the pſalmiſt, *Light is ſown for the righteous, and gladneſs for the upright in heart*; and by the wiſe man, *To him that ſoweth righteouſneſs, ſhall be a ſure reward*; *ſow to yourſelves in righteouſneſs*, ſays the prophet, *and reap in mercy*.

OTHERS again conceive the apoſtle here to be anſwering an objection that might be raiſed againſt what he had ſaid. Shall we by our gentleneſs and meekneſs indulge and cheriſh the wickedneſs of others? Ought we not rather to uſe all our zeal to puniſh and root it out? The truly wiſe men, ſays the apoſtle, by his compaſſion and meekneſs neither favours nor connives at vice and wickedneſs, but will

correct

correct it with ſuch moderation as is conſiſtent with good order and peace, and ſhall thereby always have moſt ſucceſs on the minds of men. Like a wiſe phyſician, he will treat his patient ſoftly and tenderly, will not immediately apply the laſt and moſt dreadful remedies, but reſerve them, till he has tried thoſe of a milder nature without ſucceſs. Thus, *in peace*, that is, by the moſt endearing means of perſuaſion and kindneſs, in the ſpirit of meekneſs, will the wiſe man who follows peace *ſow the fruits of righteouſneſs*; correct the vices and reform the lives of thoſe who have gone aſtray, and bring them to the practice of righteouſneſs with infinitely greater ſucceſs than thoſe, whoſe unbridled zeal puts all things into diſorder; whoſe harſhneſs and ſeverity may well frighten men, or raiſe their hatred and deteſtation, but will never ſucceed ſo as to perſuade or gain them.

I SHALL conclude this diſcourſe by recommending to our ſtudy and practice this

this heavenly wiſdom, in the beautiful words of *Solomon*, who introduces wiſdom herſelf addreſſing us in a moſt pathetical manner: *Now therefore hearken unto me ye children, for bleſſed are they who keep my ways; hear inſtruction and be wiſe, and refuſe it not. Bleſſed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the poſts of my doors; for whoſo findeth me findeth life, and ſhall obtain favour of the Lord. But he that ſinneth againſt me wrongeth his own ſoul: all they that hate me love death.* *

* Prov. viii. 32---36.

*FINIS.*

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